

DIVINE CONDUCT:

R. Dawson
OR, THE

M Y S T E R Y

Flavel F / J / K

PROVIDENCE.

WHEREIN

The Being and Efficacy of PROVIDENCE is asserted and vindicated;

The Methods of PROVIDENCE, as it passes thro' the several Stages of our Lives, opened;

A N D

The proper Course of improving all PROVIDENCES directed.

In a TREATISE upon PSALM lvii. 2.

By Mr. JOHN FLAVELL,

Late Minister of the Gospel at DARTMOUTH in DEVON.

G L A S G O W:

Printed by JOHN HALL, near the Middle of the
SALT-MARKET. M.DCC.LIII.

CONDUCT

OF THE

M. Y. T. E. K. Y.

INVESTIGATION



REPORT

ON THE

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS

OF THE

LANDS

AND

WATERS

OF THE

STATE

OF NEW YORK

IN THE

YEAR

1860

1.
I
min
He t
or e
ence
M
high
obse
II.
such
skies
'T
iny
fault
viden
as by
M
the b
ant c
and i
fear c
rounc
of al
yond
always

Letter
TO THE *Servant*

Right Honourable

WILLIAM Earl of BEDFORD,

Lord RUSSEL of Thornehaugh, &c.

MY LORD.

IT was a weighty and savoury speech, which a pious pen once saved from your Lordship's lips, viz. that you accounted the prayers of God's ministers and people, the best walls about your house.

He that so accounts, doubtless understands, that prayer engageth providence, *Isa.* 45. 11. and providence so engaged, is the surest munition, *Job.* 1. 10.

Many great men inclose their dwellings with an high wall, but the foundation (as the wisest of men observes) is laid in their own conceits, *Prov.* 18. 11. yea, in sin, and crying sin too, *Hab.* 2. 12. of such walls we may say, If the building emulate the skies, yet sin being in the bottom, all will totter.

'Tis a fond vanity, to think of ensuring a destiny that can controul the stars, and endure the assaults of fortune, (as they love to speak) whilst providence is not engaged for them, no not so much as by a bare acknowledgment.

My Lord, It is not the vast bulk of an estate, nor the best human security in the world, but the vigilant care of Divine Providence, that guards both it, and it's owners, from the stroke of ruin. 'Tis the fear of God within us, and the providence of God round about us, which make the firm and solid basis of all sanctified and durable prosperity. It is beyond all debate, that there is a providence of God, always enfolding those in everlasting arms that bear

The E P I S T L E

his Image. The impress of that image upon you, and the embraces of those arms about you, will advance you higher, and secure you better, than your noble birth or estate could ever do.

And tho' a great many of us are fallen into the dregs of time, *sensuality* running every where into *atheism*; tho' the liberality of providence hath so blinded and perfectly stupify'd the minds of some, that they neither own a providence, nor a God; yet (blessed be God) there is nevertheless a sincere part, both of the *nobles* and *commons* of *England*, which this gangrene hath not yet touched, and I hope never shall.

My Lord, it is both your honour and interest to be the entire and devoted servant of providence. It was once the wish of a good man, *I could wish that I were the same to God, that my hand is to me*. This is the most noble and divine life that can be, to live and act in this world upon eternal designs, To look upon ourselves, and what we have, as things devoted to God; not to be content that providence should serve itself of us, (for so it doth even of those things which understand nothing of it) but to study wherein we may serve providence, and be instrumental in its hand for the good of many: This is to be truly honourable; *quo magis quis Deo vivit, eo vadit nobilior, clarior, divini*or.

How much God hath honoured you in this respect, the world will understand better when your Lordship shall be gathered to your fathers, and sleep in the dust; then, he that praiseth cannot be suspected of flattery, nor he that is praised be moved with vain-glory: But the approbation of God is infinitely better than the most glorious name among men, before or after death.

And as it is most honourable to serve, so you will find

D E D I C A T O R Y.

find it most comfortable to *observe* the ways of God in his providence. To compose ourselves to think of the *conduct of providence* thro' all the *stages* of life we have hitherto passed; to note the results of this profound wisdom, the effects of its tender care, the distinguishing fruits of its special bounty; to mark how providences have gone along step by step with the promises, and both with us, till they have now brought us near to our everlasting rest;—Oh how delectable, how transporting are such meditations as these!

My Lord, It is the design of this *manual*, to assert the *being* and *efficacy* of providence against the *atheism* of the times, and to display the wisdom and care of the providence of God in all the concerns of that people who are really his. 'Tis probable, if your Lordship will stoop to such a vulgar composition, somewhat may occur of a grateful relish to your pious mind. I confess, it is not accommodated, either in exactness of method, or elegance of style, to gratify the curious; not yet is it destitute of what may please and profit the truly gracious.

Should I here recite the pleasures and advantages resulting from an humble and heedful eyeing of the methods of providence, it would look more like a *book* in an *epistle*, than an *epistle* in a *book*. One taste of spiritual sense will satisfy you better, than all accurate descriptions and high *encomiums* that the most elegant pen can bestow upon it.

My Lord, it is not that eminent station that some persons retain (in civil respects) above the vulgar, that will enable them to penetrate the mysteries, and relish the sweetness of providence, better than others; (doubtless, many that live immediately upon providence for daily bread, do thereby gain a nearer acquaintance with it, than those whose out-

The EPISTLE, &c.

ward enjoyments flow to them in a more plentiful and stated course) but those that excel in grace and experience, those that walk in converse with God in all his dispensations towards them: these are the persons who are most fully and immediately capable of these high pleasures of the Christian life. The daily flow and increase whereof in your Lordship's noble family, is the hearty desire of,

Your Lordship's

most humble servant,

From my study
at Dartmouth
Aug. 10th 1677.

JOHN FLAVELL.

To

TO THE INCENUOUS

R E A D E R S;

Those especially, who are the heedful
Observers of the Ways of PROVIDENCE.

R E A D E R,

THERE are two ways whereby the blessed
God condescends to manifest himself to men,
his Word and his Works. Of the written word we
must say, no words like these were ever written
since the beginning of time, which can (as one speaks)
take life and root in the soul; yea, doth it as really
as the seed doth in the ground, and are fitted to be
engrafted and naturalized there, so as no coalition
in nature can be more real than this, James 1. 21.
This is the most transcendent and glorious medium
of manifestation; God hath magnified his word
above all his name, Psal. 138. 2.

However, the manifestations of God by his works,
whether of creation or providence, have their va-
lue and glory; but the prime glory and excellency of
his providential works consists in this; that they are
the very fulfillings and real accomplishments of his
written word. By a wise and heedful attendance here-
unto, we might learn that excellent art, which is
(not unfitly) called by some *sciennia architectonica*,
an art to clear the mysterious occurrences of provi-
dence, by reducing them to the written word, and
there lodge them as effects in their proper causes.
And doubtless, this is one of the rarest essays men
could pursue against atheism, to shew, not only
how providences concur in a most obvious tendency
to confirm this great conclusion, Thy word is truth;

The EPISTLE

but how it sometimes extorts also the confession of a God, and the truth of his word, from those very tongues which have boldly denied it. Many thousand seals hath providence forced the very enemies of God to set to his truths, which greatly tends to our confirmation therein; especially, to see how the word and providences of God do enlighten each other; how the scriptures contain all those events, both great and small, which are disposed by providence in their seasons; and how not only the promises of the word are in the general faithfully fulfilled in the church in all her exigencies and distresses, but in particular to every member of it; they being all furnished by providence with multitudes of experiences to this use and end. O how useful are such observations!

And as the profit and use, so the delight and pleasure resulting from the observations of providence, is exceeding great. It will doubtless be a part of our entertainment in heaven, to view with transporting delight, how the designs and methods were laid to bring us thither; and what will be a part of our blessedness in heaven, may well be allowed to have a prime ingrediency into our heaven upon earth: To search for pleasures among the due observations of providence, is to search for water in the ocean; for providence doth not only ultimately design to bring you to heaven, but (as intermediate thereunto) to bring, by this means, much of heaven into your souls in the way thither.

How great a pleasure is it to discern how the most wise God is providentially steering all to the port of his own praise, and his peoples happiness, whilst the whole world is busily employed in managing the sails, and tugging at the oars with a quite opposite design and purpose? To see how they promote his design by opposing it, and fulfil his will by resisting it, enlarge his church by scattering it, and make their

TO the READER.

their rest to come the more sweet to their souls, by making their condition so restless in the world. This is pleasant to observe in general; but to record and note its particular designs upon ourselves; with what profound wisdom, infinite tenderness and incessant vigilancy, it hath managed all that concerns us from first to last, is ravishing and transporting!

O what an history might we compile of our own experiences, whilst with a melting heart we trace the footsteps of providence all along the way it hath led us to this day, and set our remarks upon its more eminent performances for us, in the several stages of our life?

Here it prevented, and there it delivered. Here it directed, and there it corrected. In this it grieved, and in that it relieved. Here was the poison, and there the antidote. This providence raised a dismal cloud, and that dispelled it again. This straitned, and that enlarged. Here a want, and there a supply. This relation withered, and that sprang up in its room. Words cannot express the high delights and gratifications, a gracious heart may find in such employment as this.

O what a world of rarities are to be found in providence! the blind heedless world makes nothing of them: They cannot find one sweet bit, where a gracious soul would make a rich feast. Plutarch relates very exactly, how Timoleon was miraculously delivered from the conspiracy of two murderers, by their meeting, in the very nick of time, a certain person, who, to revenge the death of his father, killed one of them, just as they were ready to give Timoleon the fatal blow, though he knew nothing of the business, and so Timoleon escaped the danger. And what did this wonderful work of providence, think you, yield the relator? Why, though he were one of the most learned and ingenious among the Hea-

The EPISTLE

then Sages; yet all he had of it, was only this, The Spectators (saith he) wondered greatly at the artifice and contrivance which fortune uses. This is all he could see in it. Had a spiritual and wise Christian had the dissecting and anatomizing of such a work of Providence, what glory would it have yielded to God? What comfort and encouragement to the soul? The Bee makes a sweeter meal upon one single flower, than the Ox doth upon the whole Meadow, where thousands of them grow.

O Reader, if thy heart be spiritual, and well stocked with experience, if thou hast recorded the ways of providence towards thee, and wilt but allow thyself time to reflect upon them; what a life of pleasure mayst thou live! What an heaven upon earth doth this way lead thee into! I will not here tell thee, what I have met in this path, lest it should seem to savour of too much vanity; non est religio ubi omnia patent. There are some delights and enjoyments in the Christian life, which are, and must be inclosed. But try it thy self, taste and see, and thou wilt need no other inducements; thine own experience will be the most powerful oratory to persuade thee to the study and search of providence.

Histories are usually read with delight: When once the fancy is caught, a man knows not how to disengage himself from it. I am greatly mistaken, if the history of our own lives, if it were well drawn up and distinctly perused, would not be the pleasantest history that ever we read in our lives.

The ensuing treatise is an essay to that purpose, in which thou wilt find some remarks set upon providence, in its passage through the several stages of our life. But, Reader, thou only art able to compile the history of providence for thy self, because the memorials that furnish it are only in thine own hands. However, here thou mayst find a pattern, and general

To the READER.

neral rules to direct thee in that great and difficult work, which is the very end, and design of this manual.

I have not had much regard to the dress, and ornament in which this discourse is to go abroad, for I am debtor both to the strong and weak, the wise and foolish: And in all my observations I have not found, that ever God hath made much use of laboured periods, rhetorical flowers and elegancies, to improve the power of religion in the world; yea, I have observed, how providence hath sometimes rebuked good men, when upon other subjects they have too much affected those pedantick fooleries, in withdrawing from them its usual aids, and exposing them to shame; and much more may it do so, when itself is the subject.

Reader, if thy stomach be nice and squeasie, and nothing will relish with thee, but what is spruce and elegant, there are store of such composures in the world, upon which thou mayst even surfeit thy curious fancy: Mean time, there will be found some that will bless God for what thou despisest, and and make many a sweet meal upon what thou loathest.

I will add no more, but my hearty prayers, that providence will direct this treatise to such hands, in such seasons, and so bless and prosper its design, that God may have glory, thou mayst have benefit, and myself comfort in the success thereof, who am,

Thine and the church's servant in

the hand of providence

JOHN FLAVELL.

DIVINE CONDUCT:

OR, THE

MYSTERY

OF

PROVIDENCE.

Open'd in a TREATISE upon

PSAL. lvii. 2.

I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.

THE greatness of God is a glorious and unsearchable mystery. *The Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the Earth* Psal. 47. 2. The condescension of the most high God to men is also a profound mystery. *Though the Lord be high, yet he hath respect unto the lowly*, Psal. 138. 6. But when both these meet together (as they do in this scripture) they make up a matchless mystery. Here we find the most high God performing all things for a poor distressed creature.

It is the great support and solace of the saints, in all the distresses that befall them here, that there is a wise Spirit sitting in all the wheels of motion, and governing the most excentrical creatures and their most pernicious designs to blessed and happy issues; and indeed it were not worth while to live in a world void of God and providence.

How deeply are we concerned in this matter, will appear by that great instance which this Psalm presents us with.

It was composed (as the title notes) by David prayer-wise, when he hid himself from Saul in the Caves. And is inscribed with a double title, *Almightie, Michtam of David*:

Al-taschith refers to the scope, and *Michtam* to the dignity of the subject-matter.

The former signifies *destroy not*, or let there be no slaughter; And may either refer to *Saul*, concerning whom he gave charge to his servants, not to destroy him; or rather, it hath reference to God, to whom, in this great exigence, he poured out his soul in this patheticall ejaculation, *Al-taschith*, destroy not.

The latter title, *Michtam*, signifies a golden ornament, and so is suited to the choice and excellent matter of the *Psalms*, which much more deserves such a title, than *Asaph's* his golden verses did.

Three things are remarkable in the former part of the *Psalms*; viz. I. His extreme danger. II. His earnest address to God in that extremity. III. The arguments he pleads with God in that address.

I. His extreme danger, expressed both in the title and body of the *Psalms*. The title tells us, this *Psalms* was composed by him when he hid himself from *Saul* in the cave. This cave was in the wilderness of *Engedi*, among the broken rocks, where the wild Goats inhabited, an obscure and desolate hole; yet even thither the envy of *Saul* pursued him, 1 Sam. 24. 1, 2. And now, he that had been so long hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, seems to be inclosed in the net; for the place was beset with his enemies: And having in this place no cut-let another way, and *Saul* himself entering into the mouth of this cave, in the sides and creeks whereof he and his men lay hid, and saw him; judge to how great an extremity, and to what a desperate state, things were now brought. Well might he say, as it is ver. 4. *My soul is among lions, and I ly even among them that are set on fire.* What hope now remained? What but immediate destruction could be expected?

II. Yet this frights him not out of his faith and duty; but betwixt the jaws of death he prays, and earnestly addresses himself to God for mercy, ver. 1. *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful unto me.* This excellent *Psalms* was composed by him, when there was enough to discompose the best man in the world. The repetition notes both the extremity of the danger, and the ardency of the supplicant. Mercy, mercy! nothing but mercy, and that exerting it.

The Mystery of Providence.

3

self in an extraordinary way, can now save him from ruin!

III. The arguments he pleads for obtaining mercy in this distress, are very considerable.

(1.) He pleads his reliance upon God as an argument to move mercy. *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee; yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast,* ver. 1. This his trust and dependence on God, tho' it be not argumentative in respect of the dignity of the act; yet it is so, in respect both of the nature of the object, a compassionate God, who will not expose any that take shelter under his wings, and in respect of the promise, whereby protection is assured to them that fly to him for sanctuary, *Isa. 26. 3. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.* Thus he encourages himself, from the consideration of that God, to whom he betakes himself.

(2.) He pleads former experiences of his help in past distresses, as an argument encouraging hope under the present strait, ver. 2. *I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.*

In which words I shall consider two things:

1. The duty resolved upon.

2. The encouragement to that resolution.

1. The duty resolved upon; *I will cry unto God.* Crying unto God, is an expression that doth not only denote prayer, but intense and fervent prayer. To cry, is to pray in an holy passion; and such are usually speeding prayers, *Psal. 118. 6. and Heb. 4. 7.*

2. The encouragements to this resolution; and these are twofold.

1. Objective, taken from the sovereignty of God.

And

2. Subjective, taken from the experience he had of his providence.

1. The sovereignty of God, *I will cry unto God most high.* Upon this he acts his faith in extremity of danger. *Saul is high; but God the most high; and without his permission, he is assured Saul cannot touch him. He had none to help; and if he had, he knew, God must first help the helpers, for they cannot help him. He had no means of defence or escape*

scape before him, but the Most High is not limited by means. This is a singular prop to faith, *Psalms 59. 9*

2. The experience of his providence hitherto: *Unio God that performeth all things for me.*

The word which we translate (*performeth*) comes from a root, that signifies both to *perfect*, and to *desist* or *cease*. For when a business is performed and perfected, the agent then ceases and desists from working; he puts to the last hand when he finishes the work. To such an happy issue the Lord hath brought all his doubtful and difficult matters before; and this gives him encouragement, that he will still be gracious, and perfect that which concerneth him now, as he speaks, *Psal. 138. 8. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.*

The *Septuagint* renders it, who *profiteth*, or *benefiteth* me: And it is a certain truth, that all the results and issues of providence are profitable and beneficial to the Saints. But the supplement in our translation well receives the importance of the place, *who performeth all things*: And it involves the most strict and proper notion of providence, which is nothing else, but the performance of God's gracious purposes and promises to his people; and therefore *Vatablus* and *Mus* supply and fill up the room, which the conciseness of the original leaves, with *quæ promissæ*; I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth the things which he hath promised. Payment is the performance of promises; grace makes the promise, and providence the payment.

Piscator fills it with *benignitatem & misericordiam suam*, unto God that performeth his kindness and mercy. But still it supposes the mercy performed, to be contained in the promise. Mercy is sweet in the promise; and much more so in the providential performance of it to us.

Castellio's supplement comes nearer to ours, *per omnia meorum transactorem* I will cry unto God most High, unto God the transactor of my affairs.

But our *English*, making out the sense by an universal particle, is most fully agreeable to the scope of the text. For it cannot but be a great encouragement to his faith, that God had transacted all things, or performed all things for him; this providence, that never failed him in any of

the straits that ever he met with, (and his life was a life of many straits) he might well hope it would not now fail him, tho' this were an extraordinary and matchless one.

Bring we then our thoughts a little closer to this scripture; and it will give us a fair and lovely prospect of providence.

In its	1. Universal,	Influence upon the affairs and con- cerns of the saints.
	2. Effectual,	
	3. Beneficial,	
	4. Encouraging,	

The expression imports (1.) the universal interest and influence of providence in and upon all the concerns and interests of the saints. It hath not only its hand in this or that, but in all that concerns them. It hath its eye upon every thing that relates to them throughout their lives, from first to last. Not only great, and more important, but the most minute and ordinary affairs of our lives are transacted and managed by it. It touches all things that touch us, whether more nearly or remotely.

(2.) It displays the efficacy of providential influences. Providence doth not only undertake, but performeth and perfects what concerns us. It goes through with its designs, and accomplisheth what it begins: No difficulty so clogs it, no cross accident falls in its way, but it carries its design through it: Its motions are irresistible and uncontrollable; he performs it for us.

(3.) And (which is sweet to consider) all its products and issues are exceeding beneficial to the saints. It performs all things for them. 'Tis true, we often prejudice its works, and unjustly censure its designs, and under many of our straits and troubles we say, *All these things are against us*; but indeed providence neither doth, nor can do, any thing that is really against the good of the saints: For, what are the works of providence, but the execution of God's decree, and the fulfilling of his word? And there can be no more in providence, than is in them — Now, there is nothing but good to the saints in God's purposes and promises; and therefore, whatever providence doth in their concernments, it must be (as the text speaketh) *the*

the performance of all things for them.

(4.) And if so, how cheering, supporting and encouraging must the consideration of these things be in a day of distress and trouble! What life and hope will it inspire your hearts and prayers withal, when great pressures lie upon us! It had such a cheering influence upon the Psalmist at this time, when the state of his affairs was to the eye of sense and reason forlorn, and desperate; there was now but an hair's-breadth (as we say) betwixt him and ruin.

A potent, enraged, and implacable enemy had driven him into the hole of a rock, and was come after him into that hole; yet now, whilst his soul is among lions, whilst he lies in a cranny of the rock, expecting every moment to be drawn out to death, the reflections he had upon the gracious performances of the most High for him, from the beginning to that moment, support his soul, and inspire hope and life into his prayers; *I will cry unto God most High, unto God that performeth all things for me.*

The amount of all you have in this doctrinal conclusion, *viz.*

Doct. that it is the duty of saints, especially in times of straits, to reflect upon the performances of providence for them in all the states, and thro' all the stages of their lives.

The church, in all the works of mercy, owns the hand of God, *Isa. 26. 12. Lord, thou hast wrought all our works in (or for) us.* And still it hath been the pious and constant practice of the saints in all generations, to preserve the memory of the more famous and remarkable providences that have befallen them in their times, as a precious treasure. "If thou be a christian indeed, I know thou hast, if not in thy book, yet certainly in thy heart, a great many precious favours upon record: The very remembrance and rehearsal of them is sweet; how much more sweet was the actual enjoyment!" *Baxter's saints rest*, p. 568. Thus *Moses*, by divine direction, wrote a memorial of that victory obtained over *Amalek* as the fruit and return of prayer, and built there an altar with this inscription, *Jehovah Nissi, the Lord my banner*, *Exod. 17. 14, 15.* Thus

Monica

Mordecai and Esther took all care to perpetuate the memory of that signal deliverance from the plot of Haman, by ordering the feast of Purim, as an anniversary throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that those days of Purim should not fall from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed, *Esth.* 9. 28. For this end you find Psalms indited, to bring to remembrance, *Psal.* 70. the title;—Parents giving suitable names to their children, that every time they looked upon them, they might refresh the memory of God's mercies. *1 Sam.* 1. 20.—The very places, where eminent providences have appeared, new named, upon no other design, but to perpetuate the memorial of those sweet providences which so refreshed them there:—Thence *Bethel* took its name, *Gen.* 28. 19.—And that well of water, where *Hagar* was seasonably refreshed by the angel in her distress, *Beer-la-Lai-roi*, the well of him that liveth and looketh on me, *Gen.* 16. 14. Yea, the saints have given, and God hath assumed to himself new titles upon this very score and account; *Abraham's Jekovah*, *Jirah* and *Gideon's Jekovah Shalom* were ascribed to him upon this reason. And sometimes you find the Lord styles himself, The God that brought *Abraham* from *Ur* of the *Chaldees*; then, the Lord God that brought them out of *Egypt*; then, the Lord that gathered them out of the north country; still minding them of the gracious providences, which in all those places, he had wrought for them.

Now, there is a twofold reflection upon the providential works of God.

One entire and full, in the whole complex and perfect frame thereof. This blessed sight is reserved for the perfect state. It is in the mount of God, where we shall see both the wilderness and *Canaan*; the glorious kingdom into which we are come, and the way thro' which we are led into it. There the saints shall have a ravishing view of that beautiful frame, and every part shall be distinctly discerned, as it has its particular use, and as it was connected with the other parts, and how effectually and orderly they all wrought to bring about that blessed design of their salvation according to the promise, *Rom.* 8. 28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love

God,

God, &c. For it is certain, no ship at sea keeps more exactly by the compass which directs its course, than providence doth by that promise, which is its *Cynosura* and *Pole-star*.

The other partial and imperfect in the way to glory, where we only view it in its single acts, or at most in some branches and more observable course of actions.

Between these two is the same difference, as between the sight of the disjointed wheels and scattered pins of a watch, and the sight of the whole united in one frame, and working in one orderly motion; or, between an ignorant spectator's viewing some more observable vessel or joint of a dissected body, and the accurate anatomist's discerning the course of all the veins and arteries of the body, as he follows the several branches of them thro' the whole, and plainly sees the proper places, figure, and use of each, with their mutual respect to one another.

O how ravishing and delectable a sight is that! to behold at one view the whole design of providence, and the proper place and use of every single act, which we could not understand in this world! For what Christ said to *Peter*, *John* 13. 7. is as applicable to some providences in which we are now concerned, as it was to that particular action; *What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter, thou shalt know it.* All the dark, intricate, puzzling providences, at which we were sometimes so stumbled, and sometimes amazed, which we could neither reconcile with the promise, nor with each other; nay, which we so unjustly censured and bitterly bewailed, as if they had fallen out quite cross to our happiness; we shall then see to be unto us, as the difficult passage thro' the wilderness was unto *Israel*, the right way to a city of habitation, *Psal.* 107. 7.

And, tho' our present views and reflections upon providence be so short and imperfect, in comparison of that in heaven, yet such as it is, under all its present disadvantages, it hath so much excellency and sweetness in it, that I may call it a little heaven; or, as *Jacob* called his *Bethel*, the gate of heaven. 'Tis certainly an high way of walking with God in this world; and as sweet communion may a soul enjoy with him in his providences, as in any of his ordinances. How often have the hearts of its observers

been

been melted into tears of joy, at the beholding of its wise and unexpected productions! How often hath it convinced them, upon a lober recollection of the events of their lives, that, if the Lord had left them to their own counsels, they had as often been their own tormentors, if not executioners! Into what and how many fatal mischiefs had they precipitated themselves, if providence had been as short sighted as they! They have given it their hearty thanks, for considering their *interest* more than their *importance*, and not suffering them to perish by their own desires.

The benefits of adverting to the works of providence are manifold and unspeakable, as in its place we shall shew you. But, not to entangle the thread of the discourse, I shall cast it into this method.

First, I shall prove, that the concernments of the saints in this world, are certainly conducted by the wisdom and care of special providence.

Secondly, I will shew you, in what particular concernments of theirs this providential care is evidently discovered.

Thirdly, That it is the duty of saints to advert to, and heedfully observe, these performances of providence for them in all their concernments.

Fourthly, In what manner this duty is to be performed by them.

Fifthly, What singular benefits result to them from such observations.

And then apply the whole in such Uses, as offer themselves from the point.

The First General Head.

First, I shall undertake the proof and defence of this great truth, *That the affairs of the saints in this world are certainly conducted by the wisdom and care of special providence.*

And herein I address myself with cheertulness, to perform (as I am able) a service for that providence, which hath, throughout my life, performed all things for me, the text speaks.

Ther

There is a twofold consideration of providence, according to its twofold object, and manner of dispensation: The one is general, exercised about all creatures, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate; the other special and peculiar. Christ hath an universal empire over all things. *Eph. 1. 22.* the head of the whole world by way of dominion; but an head to the church by way of union and special influence. *Joh. 17. 2.* *The Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe,* 1 *Tim. 4. 10.* The church is his special care and charge; he rules the world for its good, as an head consulting the welfare of the body.

Heathens generally denied providence; and no wonder, since they denied a God: For the same arguments that prove the one will prove the other. *Aristotle*, the prince of heathen philosophers, could not, by the utmost search of reason, find out the world's original; and therefore concludes it was from eternity. The *Epicureans* did in a sort acknowledge a God; but yet denied a providence, and wholly excluded him from any interest or concern in the affairs of the world, as being inconsistent with the felicity and tranquillity of the divine Being, to be diverted and cumber'd with the care and labour of government. This assertion is so repugnant to reason, that its a wonder themselves blush not at it is absurdity; but I guess at the design, and one of them speaks it out in broad language. *Itaque imposuistis cervicibus nostris sempiternum dominium, quem dies & noctes timeremus. Quis enim non timeat omnia providentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & plenum negotii deum? Vell. apud Cicer. de natura deorum.* They foresaw, that the concession of a providence would impose an eternal yoke upon their necks, by making them accountable for all they did to an higher tribunal; and that they must necessarily pass the time of their sojourning here in fear, whilst all their thoughts, words, and ways, were strictly noted and recorded, in order to an account, by an all-seeing and righteous God; and therefore laboured to persuade themselves, that was not, which they had no mind should be. But these atheistical and foolish conceits fall flat before the undeniable evidence of this so great and clear a truth. Now,

My business here is not so much to deal with profest *Atheists*,

heists, who deny the existence of God, and consequently deride all evidences brought from scripture, of the extraordinary events that fall out in favour of that people that that are called His; but rather to convince those, that professedly own all this; yet, never having tasted religion by experience, suspect, at least, that all these things, which we call *special providences* to the saints, are but *natural events*, or mere *contingencies*: And thus whilst they profess to own a God and a providence, (which profession is but the effect of their education) they do in the mean time live like *Atheists*, and both think and act as if there were no such thing: And really I doubt not, but this is the case of the far greatest part of the men of this generation.

But if it were indeed so, that the affairs of the world in general, and more especially those of the saints, were not conducted by divine providence, but (as they would persuade us) by the steady course of natural causes; beside which, if at any time we observe any event to fall out, it is merely casual and contingent, or that which proceeds from some hidden and secret cause in nature: If this indeed were so, let them that are tempted to believe it rationally satisfy the following demands.

First Demand.) How comes it to pass, that so many signal mercies and deliverances have befallen the people of God, above the power, and against the course of natural causes, to make way for which, there hath been a sensible suspension and stop put to the course of nature? It is most evident, that no natural effect can exceed the power of its natural cause; nothing can give another, more than it hath in itself: And it is as clear, that whatsoever acts naturally, acts necessarily:—Fire burns to the uttermost of its power:—Waters overflow, and drown all that they can: Lions, and other rapacious and cruel beasts, especially when hungry, tear and devour their prey. And, for arbitrary and rational agents, they also act according to the principles and laws of their natures:—A wicked man, when his heart is fully set in him, and his will stands in a full bent of resolution, will certainly (if he have power in his hand, and opportunity to execute his conceived mischief) give it vent; and perpetrate the wicked devices of his

his heart: For having once conceived mischief, and travelling in pain with it (according to the course of nature) he must bring it forth, as it is *Psal* 7. 14. But if any of these inanimate, brutal, or rational agents, when there is no obstacle or *remora*, have their power suspended, and that when the effect is near the birth, and the design at the very article of execution, so that, tho' they would, yet cannot hurt; to what think you is this to be assigned and referred? Yet so it hath often been seen, where God's interest hath been immediately concerned in the danger and evil of the event:—The sea divided itself in its own channel, and made a wall of water, on each side, to give God's distressed *Israel* a safe passage, and that not in a calm, but when the waves thereof roared, as it is *Isa*. 15. 15.—The fire, when blown up to the most intense and vehement flame, had no power to singe one hair of God's faithful witnesses, when, at the same instant it had power to destroy their intended executioners at a greater distance, *Dan*. 2. 22. Yea, we find it hath sometime been sufficient to consume, but not to torment, the body; as in that known instance of blessed *Baynham*, who told his enemies, the flames were to him as a bed of roses.—The hungry lions put off their natural fierceness, and became gentle and harmless, when *Daniel* was cast in among them for a prey.—The like account the church-story gives us of *Polycarp*, and *Diomysius Areopagita*, whom the fire would not touch, but stood after the manner of a ship-man's sail filled with wind about them.

Are these things according to the course and law of nature? To what secret natural cause can they be ascribed? In like manner, we find the vilest and fiercest of wicked men have been withheld by an invisible hand of restraint from injuring the Lord's people. By what secret cause in nature, was *Jeroboam's* hand dried up, and made inflexible, at the same instant it was stretched out against the man of God? *1 Kings* 13. 4. No wild beasts rend and devour their prey more greedily, than wicked men would destroy the people of God that dwell among them, were it not for this providential restraint upon them. So the *Psalmist* expresses his case in the words following my text, *My soul is among lions, and I lie among them that are set on fire.* The Di-

sciples

disciples were sent forth as sheep into the midst of Wolves,
Mat. 10. 16.

It will not avail in this case to object, those miraculous events depend only upon scripture-testimony, which the *Atheist* is not concluded by: For beside all that may be alleged for the authority of that testimony (which is needless to produce to men that own it) what is it less that every eye sees, or may see at this day? Do we not behold a weak defenceless handful of men, wonderfully, and (except this way) unaccountably preserved from ruin, in the midst of potent, enraged and truculent enemies, that fain would, but cannot, destroy them; when as yet no natural impediment can be assigned why they cannot?

And if this pose us, what shall we say, when we see events produced in the world for the good of God's chosen, by those very hands and means which were intentionally employed for their ruin? These things are as much beside the intentions of their enemies, as they are above their own expectations; such things are no rarities in the world. Was not the envy of *Joseph's* brethren, the cursed plot of *Haman*, the decree procured by the envy of the *princes* against *Daniel*, with many more of the like nature, all turned, by a secret and strange hand of Providence, to their greater advancement and benefit: Their enemies lifted them up to all that honour and preferment thy had.

*Second demand.) How is it (if the saints concerns are not ordered by a special divine providence) that natural causes unite and associate themselves for their relief and benefit in so strange a manner as they are found to do? It is undeniably evident, that there are marvellous coincidences of providence, confederating and agreeing, as it were, to meet and unite themselves to bring about the good of God's chosen. There is a like face of things shewing itself in divers places at that time, when any work for the good of the church come upon the stage of the world. As when the *Messiah*, the capital mercy, came to the temple, then *Simeon* and *Anna* were brought thither by providence as witnesses to*

So in reformation work, when the images were pulled down in *Holland*, one and the same spirit of zeal possessed them in every city and town, that the work was

done in a night. He that heedfully reads the history of *Joseph's* advancement to be the lord of *Egypt*, may number in that story, twelve remarkable acts or steps of providence, by which he ascended to that honour and authority : If but one of them had failed, in all likelihood the event had done so too: But every one fell in its order, exactly keeping its own time and place. So in the church's deliverance from the plot of *Haman*, we find no less than several acts of providence concurring strangely to produce it, as if they had all met by appointment and consent, to break that snare for them ; one thing so aptly suiting with, and making way for another, that every heedful observer must needs conclude, this cannot be the effect of casualty, but wise counsel. Even as in viewing the accurate structure of the body of a man, the figure, position, and mutual respects of the several members and vessels hath convinced some, (and is sufficient to convince all) that it was the effect of divine wisdom and power : In like manner, if the admirable adaptation of the means and instruments employed for mercy to the people of God be heedfully considered who can but confess, that as there are tools of all sorts and sizes in the shop of providence, so there is a most skilful hand that uses them, and that they could no more produce such effects of themselves, than the ax, saw, or chisel can cut or carve a rude log into a beautiful figure without the hand of a skilful artificer.

We find, by manifold instances, that there certainly are strong combinations and pre-dispositions of persons and things, to bring about some issue and design for the benefit of the church, which themselves never thought of : They hold no intelligence, communicate not their counsel to each other, yet meet together, and work together, as they did. Which is, as if ten men should meet together at one place, and in one hour, about one and the same business, and that without any fore-appointment between themselves ; Can any question, but such a meeting of means and instruments is certainly, though secretly, over-ruled by some wise invisible agent ?

Third Demand.) If the concerns of God's people be governed by special providence, *Whence is it, that the*

apt and powerful, means employed to destroy them, are rendered ineffectual; and weak contemptible means employed for their defence and comfort, crowned with success? This could never be, if things were wholly swayed by the course of nature. If we judge by that rule, we must conclude, the more apt and powerful the means are, the more successful and prosperous they must needs be; and where they are inept, weak and contemptible, nothing can be expected from them: Thus reason lays it according to the rules of nature: But providence crosses its hands, (as *Jacob* did in blessing the sons of *Joseph*) and orders quite contrary issues and events. Such was the mighty power and deep policy, used by *Pharaoh* to destroy God's *Israel*, that, to the eye of reason, it was as impossible to survive it, as for crackling thorns to abide unconsumed amidst devouring flames; by which emblem, their miraculous preservation is expressed, *Exod. iii. 2.* the bush was all on a flame but no consumption of it. The heathen *Roman* emperors who made the world tremble, and subdued the nations under them; have employed all their power and policy against the poor, naked, defenceless church, to ruin it, yet could not accomplish it, *Rev. 12. 3. 4.* O the seas of blood that heathen *Rome* shed in the ten persecutions! yet the church lives, and when the dragon gave his power to the beast, *Rev. 13. 2.* (*i. e.* the state of *Rome* became antichristian) O what slaughters have been made by the beast in all his dominions! so that the Holy Ghost represents him as drunken with the blood of the saints, *Rev. 17. 6.* And yet all will not do: The gates (*i. e.* the power and policies of hell) cannot prevail against it. How manifest the care and power of providence herein? Had half that power been employed against any other people, it had certainly swallowed them up immediately, or in the hundred part of the time worn them out. How soon was the *Per- sian* monarchy swallowed up by the *Grecian*, and that again by the *Roman*? *Dioctlesian* and *Maximin*, in the height of their persecution, found themselves so baffled by providence, that they both resigned the government and lived as private men. But in this wonderful preservation God makes good that promise, *Jer. 30. 11.* *Though I make a full end of all nations, yet will I not make a full end of thee: And*

that in *Isa.* 54. 17. No weapon formed against thee shall prosper.

On the contrary, how successful have weak contemptible means been made for the good of the church? Thus in the first planting of christianity in the world, by what weak and improbable instruments was it done? Christ did not chuse the eloquent orators, or men of authority in the courts of kings and emperors, but twelve poor mechanick and fishermen, and these not sent together in a troop, but some to take one country to conquer it, and some another by the most ridiculous course (in appearance) for such a design as could be imagined: And yet in how short a time was the gospel spread, and the churches planted by them in the several kingdoms of the world? This the *Psalmist* foresaw by the spirit of prophecy, when he said. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, to still the enemy and the avenger, *Psal.* 8. 2. At the sound of ram's horns *Jericho* is delivered into the hands of *Israel*: See *Joshua* 6. 20. By three hundred men, with their pitchers and lamps, the huge host of *Midian* is discomfited, *Judges* 6. 19. The protestants besieged in *Beziers* in *France* are delivered by a drunken drummer, who, going to his quarters at midnight, rang the alarm-bell of the town, not knowing what he did; and just then were their enemies making their assault. And as weak and improbable means have been blessed with success to the church in general, so to the preservation of its particular members also: A spider weaving her web over the mouth of an oven, shall hide the servant of Christ, *Du Moulin*, from his enemies, who took him for refuge there in that bloody *Parisian* massacre. A hen shall sustain another many days at the same time, by lodging her egg every day in the place where he had hid himself from the cut-throats. Examples might be easily multiplied in the case; but the truth is too plain and obvious to the observation of all ages to need them. And can we not acknowledge a divine and special providence over-ruling these matters, when we see the most apt and potent means for the churches ruin frustrated, and the most silly and contemptible means succeeded and prospered for its good place.

shall pro-

Fourth Demand.) If all things be governed by the course of nature, and force of natural causes, *How then comes it to pass, that men are turned (like a bowl by a rub) out of the way by what of evil, unto which they were driving on with full speed?* Good men have been engaged in the way to their own ruin, and knew it in their hearts; but providence hath met them in the way, and by strange diversions, the meaning of which they understood not till the event discovered it. *Paul* lay bound at *Cæsarea*; the high-priest and chief of the *Jews* reach a decree to *Festus*, that he might be brought bound to *Jerusalem*, at a time having laid wait in the way to kill him; but *Festus* (tho' ignorant of the plot) utterly refuses it, but chuses rather to send *Paul* with them to *Cæsarea*, and judge him there: By this their bloody design is frustrated *Acts* 25. 3, 4.

to still the Possidionious, in the life of *Augustine*, tells us, that the father of a certain town going to teach the people of a certain town, took a guide with him, to shew him the way; the guide, mistook the usual road, and ignorantly fell into a by-path, which means he escaped ruin by the hands of the bloody *matists*, who knowing his intention, way-led him to his ruin in the road.

And, as memorable and wonderful are those rubs and diversions wicked men have met with in the way of perverting the evils conceived and intended in their own hearts: *Laban* and *Esau* came against *Jacob* with mischiefous purposes; but no sooner are they come nigh him, but the shackles of restraint are immediately clapt upon them both, so that their hands cannot perform their intended mischief. *Balaam* runs greedily for reward to curse *Israel*, but he meets with an unexpected check at his very out-set; and tho' that stopt him not, but he essay'd every way to do mischief, yet he still finds himself fettered by an effectual bond of restraint, that he can noway shake off, *Numb.* 22. 25, 38. *Saul*, the high priest's blood-hound, breathes out threatnings against the church, and goes with a bloody commission towards *Damascus*, to hale the poor silly flock of *Christ* to the slaughter; but, when he comes nigh his goal, he meets an unexpected stop in the way, by which the mischief is not only diverted, but himself con-

verted to Christ, *Acts* 9. 2, 3, 4. Who can but see the finger of God in these things?

Fifth Demand.) If there be not an over-ruling providence ordering all things for the good of God's people, *How comes it to pass, that the good and evil, which is done to them in this world, is accordingly repaid into the bosoms of them that are instrumental therein?*

1. How clear is it to every man's observation, that the kindnesses and benefits that any have done to the Lord's people, have been rewarded with full measure into their bosoms? The *Egyptians* refused to obey *Pharaoh's* inhuman command, and saved the male children of *Israel*; for this the Lord dealt well with them, and built them houses, *Exod.* 1. 12. The *Shunamite* was hospitable, and careful for *Elisha*, and God recompensed it with the desirable enjoyment of a son, *2 Kings* 4. 9, 17. *Rahab* hid the spies and was exempted from the common destruction for it, *Heb.* 11. 13. *Publius*, the chief man of the island *Melita*, courteously received and lodged *Paul* after his shipwreck: The Lord speedily repaid him for that kindness, and healed his father, who lay sick at that time of a bloody-flux and fever, *Acts* 28. 7, 8 —

2. In like manner, we find the evils done to God's people, have been repaid by a just retribution to their enemies.

Pharaoh and the *Egyptians* were cruel enemies to God's *Israel*, and designed the ruin of their poor babes; and God repaid it, in smiting all the first-born of *Egypt* in one night, *Exod.* 12. 29.

Haman erected a gallows fifty cubits high for good *Mordecai*; and God so ordered it, that himself and his ten sons were hanged on it. And indeed it was but meet, that he should eat the fruit of that tree which himself had planted, *Ester.* 7. 10.

Ahithophel plots against *David*, and gives counsel, like an oracle, how to procure his fall; and that very counsel like a surcharged gun, recoils upon himself, and procures his ruin: For seeing his good counsel rejected, (good politically, not morally, it was now easy for him to guess,

at the issue, and so at his own fate. 2 Sam. 19. 23.

Charles IX. most inhumanly made the very canals of Paris to stream with protestant blood, and soon after he died miserably, his blood streaming from all parts of his body.

Stephen Gardiner, that burnt so many of God's dear servants to ashes, was himself so scorched up by a terrible inflammation, that his very tongue was black and hung out of his mouth, and in dreadful torment ended his wretched days.

Maximinus, that cruel emperor, who set forth his proclamation engraven in brass, for the utter abolishing of the Christian religion, was speedily smitten, like Herod, with a dreadful judgment; swarms of lice preying upon his entrails, and causing such a stench, that his physicians could not endure to come nigh him, and, for refusing it, were slain. Hundreds of like instances might easily be produced, to confirm this observation. And who can but see by these things, that *verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

Yea, so exact have been the *retributions* of providence to the enemies of the church, that not only the same persons, but the same members that have been the instruments of mischief, have been made the subjects of wrath.

The same arm which *Jeroboam* stretched out to smite the prophet, God smites. The emperor *Aurelian*, when he was ready to subscribe the edict for the persecution of the Christians, was suddenly cramped in his knuckles, that he could not write.

Mr. *Groenhill* in his exposition upon *Ezek. 11. 13.* tells his auditory, that there was one then present in the congregation, who was an eye witness of a woman scoffing at another for purity and holy walking, who had her tongue stricken immediately with the palsy, and died thereof within two days.

Henry II. of France, in a great rage against a protestant counsellor, committed him to the hands of one of his nobles to be imprisoned, and with these words, That he would see him burned with his own eyes: But mark the righteous providence of God, within a few days after, the same nobleman, with a lance put into his hands by the king, and at a tilting-match run the said lance into one of his eyes, whereof he died.

Yea, providence hath made the very place of sinning, the place of punishment, *1 Kings 21. 19. In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth; shall dogs lick thy blood;* and it was exactly fulfilled, *2 Kings 9. 26.* Thus *Tophet* is made a burying place for the Jews, till there was no room to bury; and that was the place where they had offered up their sons to *Molech*, *Jer. 7. 31, 32.* The story of *Nightingale* is generally known, which Mr. Fox relates, how he fell out of the pulpit and brake his neck, whilst he was abusing that scripture, *1 John 1. 10.*

And thus the scriptures are made good by providence; *who so diggeth a pit shall fall therein, and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him, Prov. 26. 27. and Mat. 7. 2. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Objection. If any shall yet say, *These things may fall out casually; That many thousands of the church's enemies have died in peace, and their end been like other men.*

Solution. We answer with *Augustine*, if no sin were punished here, no providence would be believed; and if every sin should be punished here, no judgment would be expected. But that none may think those events to be merely casual and accidental, we yet further demand.

Sixth Demand.) If these things be merely casual, How is it that they square and agree so exactly with the scripture in all particulars?

We read, *Amos 3. 3. Can two walk together except they be agreed? If two men travel in one road, it is like they are agreed to go to the same place. Providences and scriptures go all one way; and, if they seem at any time to go diverse or contrary ways, be sure they will meet at the journey's end. There is an agreement betwixt them so to do.*

Doth God miraculously suspend the power of natural cause, as in the first demand was opened? Why? this is no accidental thing, but what harmonizeth with the word, *Isa 43. 2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

Do natural causes unite and associate themselves for the good of God's people? Why, this is no more than what

is contained in the promises, and is but the fulfilling of that scripture, 1 Cor. 3. 22. *All is yours, for ye are Christ's*; i. e. the use, benefit and service of all the creatures is for you, as your need shall require.

Are the most apt and powerful means employed for their ruin frustrated? Who can but see the scriptures fulfilled in, and expounded by, such providences? See *Isa.* 54. 15, 16, 17. and 8. 8, 9, 10. expounded by 2 *King* 18. 17. & seq.

See you at any time a rub of providence diverting the course of good men from falling into evil, or wicked men from committing evil? How loudly do such providences proclaim the truth and certainty of the scriptures, which tell us, *That the way of man is not in himself, neither is it in him that walks to direct his steps*. Jer. 10. 23. and that in Prov 16. 9. *A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps*?

Do you see adequate retributions made to those that injure or befriend the people of God? Why, when you see all the kindness and love they have shown the saints, returned with an overplus into their bosoms; How is it possible, but you must see the accomplishment of these scriptures in such providences? *Isa.* 32. 8. 2 Cor. 9. 6. *The liberal soul deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things he shall stand.*

And when you see the evils men have done, or intended to do to the Lord's people, recoiling upon themselves, he is perfectly blind, that sees not the harmony such providences bear with these scriptures, *Psal.* 140. 11, 12. *Psal.* 7. 14, 15, 16. *Psal.* 9. 16.

O what exact proportions do providences and scriptures hold! little do men take notice of it. Why did Cyrus, contrary to all rules of state and policy, freely dismiss the captives, but to fulfill that scripture, *Isa.* 45. 13. So that it was well observed by one, That as God hath stretched out the *expansum* or firmament over the *natural*; so he hath stretched out his word over the *rational* world. And as the creatures on earth are influenced by those heavenly bodies, so are all creatures in the world influenced by the word, and do infallibly fulfil it, when they design to cross it.

Seventh Demand.) If these things be contingent, *How is it that they fall out in such remarkable nicks and junctures of time, which makes them so greatly observable to all that consider them?*

We find a multitude of providences so timed to a minute, that had they fallen out never so little sooner or later, they had signified but little what now they do. Certainly, it cannot be casualty, but counsel, that so exactly nicks, the opportunity. Contingencies keep to no rules.

How remarkable to this purpose, was the tidings brought to *Saul*, that the *Philistines* had invaded the land? *1 Sam.* 23. 27. just as he was ready to grasp the prey. — The angel calls to *Abraham*, and shews him another sacrifice, just when his hand was giving the fatal stroke, to *Isaac*, *Gen.* 22. 10, 11. — A well of water is discovered to *Hagar* just when she had left the child, as not able to see his death, *Gen.* 21. 16, 19. — *Rabshakeh* meets with a blasting providence, hears a rumour that frustrated his design, just when ready to give the shock against *Jerusalem*, *Isa.* 37. 7. 8. — So when *Haman's* plot against the Jews was ripe, and all things, ready for execution; *On that night could not the king sleep*, *Esth.* 6. 1. — When the horns are ready to gore *Judah*, immediately *carpenters* are prepared to fray them away, *Zach.* 1. 18. 19, 20, 21. How remarkable was the relief of *Rachel*, by a shoal of fish that came into the harbour, when they were ready to perish with famine; such as they never observed before, nor after that time. — Mr *Dod* could not go to bed one night, but had a strong impulse to visit (tho' unseasonably) a neighbour gentleman, and just as he came, he meets him at his door, with an halter in his pocket, just going to hang himself. — Dr *Tate* and his wife, in the *Irish rebellion*, flying thro' the woods with a sucking-child, which was just ready to expire; the mother going to rest it upon a rock, puts her hand upon a bottle of warm milk, by which it was preserved. — A good woman (from whose mouth I received it) being driven to a great extremity, all supplies failing, was exceedingly plunged into unbelieving doubts and tears, not seeing whence supplies should come; when lo! in the nick of time, turning some things in a chest, unexpectedly lights upon a piece of gold, which supplied her present wants, till God opened another door

of supply. If these things fall out casually, How is it they observe the very nick of time so exactly? as that it is become proverbial in scripture, Gen. 22. 14. *In the mean of the Lord it shall be seen.*

Eighth Demand.) Lastly, *Were these things casual and contingent, How can it be, that they should fall out so immediately upon, and consonantly to the prayers of the saints? So that in many Providences, they are able to discern a very clear answer to their prayers, and are sure they have the petitions they asked of him* 1 John 5. 15.

Thus when the sea divided itself, just upon *Israel's* cry to heaven, *Exod.* 14. 10. When so signal a victory is given to *Assa*, immediately upon that pathetical cry to heaven, *Help us, O Lord our God* 2 Chron. 14. 11, 12.—When *Ahithophel* shall go and hang himself, just upon that prayer of distressed *David* 2 Sam. 15. 13.—When *Haman* shall fall and his plot be broken, just upon the fast kept by *Mordecai* and *Esther*, *Esth.* 4. 16.—Our own *Speed*, in his history of *Britain*, tells us, that *Richard I.* besieged a castle with his army; they offered to surrender, if he would save their lives; he refuses, and threatens to hang them all: Upon this an *Arbalafter* charged his bow with a square arrow, making first his prayer to God, that he would direct the shot, and deliver the innocent, from oppression; it struck the king himself, whereof he died, and they were delivered.—*Abraham's* servant prayed for success; and see how it was answered, *Gen.* 24. 45.—*Peter* was cast into prison, and prayer was made for him by the church, and see the event, *Acts*, 12. 5, 6; 7, 12. I could easily add to these, the wonderful examples of the return of prayers which was observed by *Luther*, and *Dr. Winter* in *Ireland*, and many more; but I judge it needless, because most christians have a stock of experiences of their own, and are well assured, that many of the providences that befall them, are, and can be, no other than the return of their prayers.

And now, who can be dissatisfied in this point, that wisely considers these things? Must we not conclude as it is, *Job* 36. 7. *He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous.* And as, 2 Chron. 16. 9. *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through*

through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him? His providences proclaim him to be a God hearing prayers.

The second General Head.

HAVING proved, That the concernments of the saints in this world are certainly conducted by the wisdom and care of special providence; my next work is to shew you, *In what affairs and concerns of theirs, the providence of God doth more especially appear; or what are the most remarkable performances of providence for them in this world.*

And here I am not led directly by my text, to speak of the most internal and spiritual performances of providence, immediately relating to the souls of his people, tho' they all relate to their souls mediately and eventually; but of the more visible and external performances of providence for them; and it is not to be supposed, I should touch all these neither; they are more than the sands. But that which I aim at, is to discourse to you of some more special and more observable performances of providence for you. And we shall begin at the beginning.

The first Performance of Providence.

And first, Let us consider, how well providence hath performed the first work that ever it did for us, in our formation and protection in the womb. Certainly, this is a very glorious and admirable performance; it is that the Psalmist admires, *Psal 139. 15. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth.* The womb is so called upon this account, because, as curious artists, when they have some choice piece in hand, perfect it in private, and then bring it into the light for all to gaze at; so it was here. And there are two things admirable in this performance of providence for us.

I. The rare structure and excellent composition of the body; *I am wonderfully made*; that word *Ruchampri*—is

very

very full. The vulgar renders it, *painted as with a needle* &c. richly embroidered with nerves and vains. Oh the curious workmanship that is in one part, the eye! How hath it forced some to acknowledge a God upon the examination of it! Providence, when it went about this work, had its model or pattern before it, according to which it moulded every part, as it is, *ver. 16. In thy book were all my members written.* Hast thou an integral perfection and fulness of members? It is because he wrote them all in his book, or limned out thy body, according to that exact model which he drew of thee in his own gracious purpose, before thou hadst a being: Had an eye, an ear, a hand, a foot, been wanting in the platform, thou hadst now been sadly sensible of the defect: This world had been a dungeon to thee, without those windows; thou hadst lived as many do, an object of pity to others. If thou have low thoughts of his mercy, ask the blind, the deaf, the lame and the dumb, the value and worth of those mercies, and they will tell thee. There is a world of cost bestowed upon thy very body. Thou mightst have been cast into another mould, and created a worm or a toad. I remember *Luther* tells us of two cardinals riding in great pomp to the council of *Constance*, and by the way they heard a man in the fields bitterly weeping and wailing: When they came to him, they found him intently viewing an ugly toad; and asking him, why he wept so bitterly, he told them, his heart was melted with this consideration, that God had not made him such a loathsome and deformed creature; *hoc est quod amare flet*, said he; whereupon one of them cries out; well, said the Father, *surgens indocti. Occupant caelum*, the unlearned will rise and take heaven; and we, with our learning, shall be cast into hell. No part of the common lump was so figured and polished as man is. *Galen* gave *Epicurus* an hundred years time to imagine a more commodious situation, configuration, or composition, of any one member of the human body. And if all the angels had studied to this day, they could not have cast the body of man into a more curious mould.

2. And yet all this is but the enamelling of the case, or polishing the casket wherein the rare jewel lies. Providence hath not only built the house, but brought the inhabitant

habitant (I mean the soul) into the possession of it. A glorious piece it is, that bears the very image of God upon it, being all in all, and all in every part! How noble are its faculties and affections! How nimble, various, and indefatigable are its motions! How comprehensive is its capacity? It is a companion for angels, nay, capable of espousals to Christ, and eternal communion with God? It's the wonder of the earth, and the envy of hell.

Suppose now (and why should you not suppose, what you so frequently behold in the world?) that providence had so permitted and ordered it, that thy soul had entered into thy body with one or two of its faculties wounded and defective: Suppose its understanding had been cracked; what a miserable life hadst thou lived in this world? Neither capable of service nor comfort. And truly, when I have considered those two works of providence, in bringing into the world in all countries and ages some such spectacles of pity; some deprived of the use of reason, and differing from beasts in little more than shape and figure; and others, tho' sound in their understandings, yet deformed or defective in their bodies, monstrous, misshapen and loathsome creatures; I can resolve the design of this providence into nothing beside a demonstration of his sovereign power; except they be designed as soils, to set off the beauty of other rare and exquisite pieces, and intended to stand before your eyes, as monitors of God's mercy to you, that your hearts (as oft as you behold them) might be melted into thankfulness for such distinguishing favour to you.

Look then (but not proudly) upon thy outside and inside; see and admire what providence hath done for thee, and how well it hath performed the first service that ever it did for thee in this world. And yet, this was not all it did for thee: Before thou sawest this world, it preserved thee, as well as formed thee in the womb; else thou hadst been as thole embryo: *Job* speaks of, *Job* 3. 11, 12 *that never saw the light*. Abortives go for nothing in the world; and there are multitudes of them; some that never had a reasonable soul breathed into them; but only the rudiments and rough draught of a body; these come not into the account of men, but perish as the beast doth: Other

tha

A glo-
upon it,
e are its
indefa-
s capa-
espous-
It's the
y, what
vidence
entered
ounded
crackr;
d? Nei-
when I
bring-
ne such
reason,
and fi-
gs, yet
mishap-
esign of
n of his
e, to set
and in-
f God's
d them)
uishing
and in-
or thee,
at ever
not all
prefer-
le thou
12 that
world;
r had a
rudim-
into the
Other
tha

hat die in, or, shortly after they come out of the womb ;
nd tho' their life was but for a moment, yet that moment
entrails an eternity upon them ; And had this been your
case, as it is the case of millions, then (supposing your
salvation) yet had you been utterly unserviceable to God in
the world: None had been the better for you, nor you the
better of any in the world: You had been utterly uncap-
able of all that good, which throughout your life,
you have either done to others, or received from others.

And if we consider the nature of that obscure life we
lived in the womb ; how small an accident (had it been
permitted by providence) had extinguished our life, like a
bird in the shell ! We cannot therefore but admire the
tender care of providence over us, and say with the psalmist,
Psal. 139. 13. Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb ; and
not only so, but as it is, *Psal. 22. 9. Thou art he, that took
me out of my mother's womb* He preserved thee there to the
fulness of time, and, when that time was come, brought
thee safely, thro' manifold hazards, into that place in the
world which he from eternity espied for thee. Which
leads us to the second performance.

The second Performance of Providence.

The second great performance of providence, for the people of God,
respects the place and time in which it ordered their nativity to
fall. And truly, this is no small concernment to every one
of us, but of vast consequence, either to our good or evil,
tho' it be little minded by most men. I am perswaded,
the thoughts of few Christians penetrate deep enough in-
to this providence, but slide too slightly and superficially
over an abyss of much mercy, rich and manifold mercy,
wrapt up in this gracious performance of providence for
them.

Ah friends ! Can you think it an indifferent thing, into
what part of the world the womb of nature had cast you
out ? Is there no odds, upon what spot of the creation, or
in what age of the world, your lot had fallen ? It may be
you have not seriously bethought yourselves about this
matter. And, because this point is so seldom touched, I
will therefore dive a little more particularly and distinct-
ly

ly into it, and endeavour to warm your affections with a representation of the many rich benefits you owe to this one performance of providence for you.

And we will consider it under a double respect or relation, as it respects your present comfort in this world, and as it relates to your eternal happiness in the world to come,

1. This performance of providence for you doth very much concern your present comfort in this world. All the rooms in this great house are not alike pleasant and commodious for the inhabitants of it. You read, *Psal.* 74. 20. *of the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty:* And many such dismal places are found in the habitable earth. What a vast tract of the world lies as a waste wilderness?

Suppose your mothers had brought you forth in *America*, among the savage *Indians*, who herd together as brute beasts, are scorched with heat, and starved with cold, being naked, destitute and defenceless. How poor, miserable and unprovided of earthly comforts and accommodations are many millions of the inhabitants of this world! What mercies do you enjoy in respect of the amenity, fertility, temperature and civility of the place of your habitation? What is it but a garden inclosed out of a wilderness? I may, without partiality or vanity say, God hath (even upon temporal accounts) provided you with one of the healthfullest, pleasantest, and in all respects, the best furnished rooms in all the great house of this world. Hear what our own *Chronicler* saith of it, *It is the fortunate island, the paradise of pleasure, the garden of God; whose valleys are like Eden, whose hills are as Lebanon, whose Springs are as Pishah, whose rivers are as Jordan, whose wall is the Ocean, and whose defence is the LORD JEHOVAH.*

You are here provided with necessary and comfortable accommodations for your bodies, that a great part of the world are unacquainted with. It is not with the poorest among us, as it is said to be with the poor *Russians* whose poverty pinches and bites with such sharp teeth, that their poor cry at the doors, *Give me & cut me, give me & kill me.*

Say not, The barbarous nations in this excel you; that they possess the mines of silver and gold, which it may be you think enough to salve all other inconveniencies of life. Alas poor creatures! better had it been for them

their country had brought forth briars and thorns, instead of gold, silver, and precious stones; for this hath been the occasion of ruining all their other comforts in this world: This hath invited their cruel avaricious enemies among them, under whose servitude they groan, and die without mercy; and thousands of them have chosen death rather than life, on the terms they enjoyed it. And why might not your lot have fallen there as well as where it is? Are they not made of the same clay, and endowed with as good a nature as yourselves? O what a distinction hath divine mercy made, where nature made none! Consider ungrateful man, thou mightest have fallen into some of those regions, where a tainted air frequently cloyes the laws of death; where the inhabitants differ very little from the beasts in the manner of their living: But God hath provided for thee, and given the poorest among us far better accommodations of life, than the greatest among them are ordinarily provided with: O what hath providence done for you!

(2.) But all that I have said is very inconsiderable, in comparison with the spiritual mercies, and advantages you here enjoy for your souls. Oh, this is such an advantageous cast of providence for you, as obliges you to a thankful acknowledgement of it to all eternity! For let us here make a few suppositions in the case before us, and the glory of providence will shine like a sun-beam full in your faces.

(1) Suppose it had been your lot, to have fallen in any of those vast continents possessed by *pagans* and *heathens* at this day, who bow down to the stock of a tree, and worship the host of heaven. This is the case of millions, and millions of millions: For *pagan idolaters* (as that searching scholar Mr. Brierwood informs us) do not only fill the circumference of nine hundred miles in *Europe*, but almost the one half of *Africa*, more than the half of *Asia*, and almost the whole of *America*.

Oh how deplorable had thy case been, if a *pagan idolatress* had brought thee forth, and idolatry had been suck'd in with thy mother's milk! then in all probability, thou hadst been at this day worshipping devils, and potting with full speed in the direct road to damnation; for these

are

are the people of God's wrath, *Jer. 10. 15. Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name. How dreadful is that imprecation against them Psal 97. 7. which takes hold of them and all that's theirs, Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols!*

(2.) Or suppose your lot to have fallen among *Mahometans*, who, next to pagans, spread over the greatest tract of the earth: For tho' *Arabia* bred that unclean bird, yet it was not that cage that could long contain him; for not only the *Arabians*, but the *Persians*, *Turks*, and *Tartars*; do all bow down their backs under that grand impostor. This poison hath dispers'd itself thro' the veins of *Asia*, over a great part of *Africk*, even the circumference of seven thousand miles, and stops not there, but hath tainted a considerable part of *Europe* also.

Had your lot fallen here, O what unhappy men and women had you been notwithstanding the natural amenity and pleasantness of your native soil! You had then adored a *grand impostor*, and died in a fool's *paradise*. Instead of God's lively oracles, you had been (as they are now) deceived to your eternal ruin, with such fond, mad and wild dreams, as whoso considers, would think the authors had more need of manacles and fetters, than arguments or sober answers.

(3.) Or, if neither of these had been your lot, but you had been emptied by the womb of nature into this little spot of the earth which is christianized by profession, but nevertheless, for the most part, over-run by *popish idolatry*, and *antichristian* delusions; what unhappy men and women had you been, had you suck'd a *popish* breast! For this people are to be the subjects of the *vials* of God's wrath to be poured out successively upon them, as you may read *Rev. 16.* And the scriptures, in round and plain language, tell us, what their fate must be; *2 Thess. 2. 11, 12. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Nay, you might have fallen into the same land in which your habitation now is, and yet have that no advantage by it as to salvation, if he had chose the bounds of your habitations, had not also graciously determined the times for you, *Act 17. 26.* For,

(4.)
pagan
gross a
people
was w
upon.

The
caldro
the la
ances
this n
were
which
nor to

(5.)
ferabl
to he
skulk
them
ed up
the n

Bu
been,
worl
we h
ourse
with
put i
matic
mar
light
did f
Engla
it; y
have
prov
as th

Ob
his
etern
graw

(4.) Suppose your lot had fallen where it is, during the pagan state of England, who, for many hundred years, were gross and vile idolaters. Thick darkness overspread the people of the island, and, as in other countries, the devil was worshipped, and his lying oracles zealously attended upon.

The shaking of the top of *Jupiter's* oak in *Dodona*, the caldron smitten with the rod in the hand of *Jupiter's* image, the laurel and fountain in *Daphne*, these were the ordinances on which the poor deluded wretches waited. So in this nation they worshipped idols also; the sun and moon were adored for gods; with many other abominable idols, which our ancestors worshipped, and whose memorials are not to this day quite obliterated among us.

(5.) Or, suppose our lot had fallen in those latter miserable days, in which queen *Mary* sent so many hundreds to heaven in a fiery chariot, and the poor protestants skulked up and down in holes and woods, to preserve them from *popish* inquisitors, who like blood-hounds hunted up and down thro' all the cities, towns and villages of the nation, to seek out the poor sheep of Christ for a prey.

But such hath the special care of providence towards us been, that our turn to be brought upon the stage of this world was graciously reserved for better days; so that, if we had had our own option, we could not have chosen for ourselves as providence hath. We are not only furnished with the best room in this great house, but, before we were put into it, it was swept with the besom of national reformation from idolatry; Yea, and washed by the blood of martyrs from *popish* filthiness; and adorned with gospel lights, shining in as great a lustre in our days as ever they did since the apostles days. You might have been born in *England* for many ages, and not have found a Christian in it; yea, and since Christianity was here owned, and not have met a protestant in it. Oh! what an obligation hath providence laid you under, by such a merciful performance as this for you!

Objection. If you say, *All this indeed is true; but what is this to eternal Salvation? Do not multitudes that enjoy privileges eternally perish notwithstanding them; yea, and perish with an aggravation of sin and misery beyond other sinners?*

Solution.

Solution. True, they do so; and it is of very sad consideration that it should be so: But yet we cannot deny this to be a very choice and singular mercy, to be born in such a land, and at such a time. For let us consider what helps for salvation men here enjoy, beyond what they could enjoy, had their lot fallen according to the fore-mentioned suppositions.

(1.) Here we enjoy the ordinary means of salvation, which elsewhere men are denied & cut off from, so that, if any among the heathens be saved and brought to Christ, it must be in some miraculous or extraordinary way: For *How shall they believe in him of whom they never heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?* Rom. 10. 14. Alas! were there a desire awakened in any of their hearts after a gospel-discovery of salvation (which ordinarily is not, nor can be, rationally supposed) yet, poor creatures, they might travel from sea to sea to hear the word, and not find it: Whereas you can hardly miss the opportunities of hearing the gospel; sermons meet you frequently; so that you can scarcely shun or avoid the ordinances and instruments of your salvation. And is this nothing? Christ even forces himself upon us!

(2.) Here, in this age of the world, the common prejudices against Christianity are removed by the advantage it hath of a publick profession among the people, and protection by the laws of the country: Whereas, were your habitation among *Jews, Mahometans, or heathen idolaters*, you would find Christ and Christianity the common odium of the country; every one defying and deriding both name and thing, and such yourselves likely had been, if your birth and education had been among them. For you may observe, that what ever is traditionally delivered down from father to son, every one is fond of, and zealous in its defence. The *Jews, Heathens and Mahometans* are at this day, so tenacious of their errors, that with spitting, bissing, and clapping of hands, and all other signs of indignation and abhorrence, they chase away all others from among them.

Is it not then a special mercy to you to be cast into such country and age, where (as Mr. Pink observes) the true religion hath the same advantages over every false one,

as in other countries they have over it? Here you have the presence of precious means, and the absence of soul destroying prejudices; two signal mercies.

(3.) Here, in this age of the world, Christianity bespeaks you as soon as you are capable of any sense, or impression of religion upon you; and so by an happy anticipation, blocks up the passages, by which a false religion would else certainly enter. Here you suck in the first notions and principles of Christianity, even with the mother's milk; and certainly, such a prepossession is a choice advantage. *Quo semel est imbuta, recens servabit odorem testidui.* Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it, Prov. 22. 6

(4.) Here you have, or may have, the help and assistance of Christians to direct your way, resolve your doubts, support your burdens, and help you thro' those difficulties that attend the new birth. Alas! if a poor soul had any beginnings, or faint workings and stirrings after Christ and true religion, in many other countries, the hand of every man would presently be against him, and none would be found to relieve, assist and encourage, as you may see in that example of *Galeacius*; the nearest relations would, in that case, prove the greatest enemies, the country quickly hoot at him as a monster, and cry, away with the hererick to the prison or stake.

Whether these eventually prove blessings to your souls or no, certain I am, that in themselves they are singular mercies, and helps to salvation, that are denied to millions besides you. So that, if *Plato*, when he was near his death, could bless God for three things, viz. That he was a man, and not a beast; that he was born in *Greece*; and brought up in the time of *Socrates*: Much more cause have you to admire providence, that you are men and not beasts; that you were born in *England*, and brought up in gospel-days here. This is a land the Lord hath espied for you, as the expression is, *Ezek. 20. 6.* and concerning it you have abundant cause to say, as in another case the psalmist doth, *Psal. 116. 6.* *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage.*

*Divine Conduct: Or,
The third Performance of Providence.*

The next observable performance of providence, which must be heedfully adverted to and weighed, *is the designation of the stock and family out of which we should spring and rise.* And truly, this is of special consideration, both as to our temporal and eternal good: For whether the families, in which we grew up, were great or small in *Israel*, whether our parents were of the higher or lower class among men; yet if they were such as feared God, and wrought righteousness, if they took any care to educate you religiously, and train you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, you are bound to reckon it among your chief mercies, that you sprung from the loins of such parents; for from this spring a double stream of mercy rises to you

1. Temporal and external mercies to your outward man. You cannot but know, that as godliness entails a blessing, so wickedness and unrighteousness a curse, upon posterity. An instance of the former you have in *Gen. 17. 18. 20.* On the contrary, you have the threatening, *Zech. 5. 4.* and both together, *Prov. 3. 33. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesteth the habitation of the just.* True it is, that both these imply the childrens treading in the steps of their parents, according to *Ezek. 18.* but how frequently is it seen, that wicked men breed their children vainly and wickedly: so that, as it is said of *Abijam, 1 Kings 15. 3. He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him;* and so the curse is entailed from generation to generation. To escape this curse, is a choice providence

2. But especially take notice, what a stream of spiritual blessings and mercies flows from this providence to the inner-man. O, it is no common mercy to descend from pious parents! Some of us do not only owe our natural life to them, as instruments of our beings, but our spiritual and eternal life also. It was no small mercy to *Timothy*, to be descended from such progenitors, *2 Tim. 1. 5.* nor to *Augustine*, that he had such a mother as *Monica*, who planted in his mind the precepts of life with her words, watered them with her tears, and nourished them with her example.

ample. We will a little more particularly inspect this mercy, and in so doing, we shall find manifold mercies contained in it.

(1.) What a mercy was it to us, to have parents that prayed for us before they had us, as well as in our infancy, when we could not pray ourselves? Thus did *Abraham*, *Gen.* 15. 2 and *Hannah*, *1 Sam.* 1. 10, 11. and some here likely are the fruits and returns of their parents prayers. This was that holy course they continued all their days for you, carrying all your concerns, especially your eternal ones, before the Lord with their own; and pouring out their souls to God so affectionately for you, when their eye-strings and heart-strings were breaking. Oh put a value upon such mercies; for they are precious. It is a greater mercy, to descend from praying parents, than from the loins of nobles. See *Job's* pious practice, *Job* 1. 5.

(2.) What a special mercy was it to us, to have the excrescences of corruption nip'd in the bud by their pious and careful discipline? We now understand what a critical and dangerous season youth is, the wonderful proclivity of that age to every thing that is evil. Why else are they called youthful lusts, *2 Tim.* 2. 22? When *David* asketh, *Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?* It is plainly enough implied, in the very question, that the way he takes lieth thro' the pollutions of the world in his youth, *Psal.* 119. 9. When you find a *David* praying, that God would *not remember the sins of his youth*, *Psal.* 25. 7. and a *Job* bitterly complaining, that God *made him to possess the sins of his youth*, *Job* 13. 26.—Sure, you cannot but reflect, with a very thankful heart, upon those happy means, by which the corruption of your nature was happily prevented or restrained in your youth.

(3.) And how great a mercy was it, that we had parents, who carefully instilled the good knowledge of God into our souls in our tender years? How careful was *Abraham* of this duty, *Gen.* 18. 19, and *David*, *1 Chron.* 28. 9? We have some of us had parents, who might say to us, as the apostle, *Gal.* 4. 19. *My little children, of whom I travail again in birth till Christ be formed in you.* As they longed for us before they had us, and rejoiced in us when they had us; so they could not endure to think, that when

they

they could have us no more, the devil should. As they thought no pains, care or cost, too much for our bodies to feed them, clothe and heal them; so did they think no prayers, counsels or tears, too much for our souls, that they might be saved. They knew a parting time would come, be wixt them and us, and did strive to make it as easy and comfortable to them as they could, by leaving us in Christ, within the blessed bond of his covenant. They were not glad, that we had health, and indifferent whether we had grace. They as sensibly felt the miseries of our souls, as of our bodies; and nothing was more desirable to them, than that they might say in that great day, Lord, here am I, and the children which thou has given me.

(4.) And was it not a special favour to us, to have parents that went before us as patterns of holiness, and beat the path to heaven for us by their examples? Who could say to us, as *Phil. 4. 9* *What things ye have heard and seen in me, that do*; and as *I Cor. 11. 1* *Be ye followers of us as we are followers of Christ*? The parents life is the child's copy. Oir is no common mercy, to have a fair copy set before us, especially in the moulding age; we saw what they did; as well as heard what they said. It was *Abraham's* commendation, that he commanded his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord. And such mercies some of us have had also.

Ah! my friends, let me beg you, that you will set special remarks upon this providence, which so graciously wrought for you: And that your hearts may be more thoroughly warmed in the sense of it, compare your condition with others, and seriously bethink yourselves

(1.) How many children there be among us, that are drawn headlong to hell by their cruel and ungodly parents, who teach them to curse and swear as soon as they can speak? Many families there are, wherein little other language is heard, but what is the dialect of hell. These, like the old logs and small spray, are preparing for the fire of hell, where they must burn together. Of such children, that scripture, *Psal. 49. 19* will one day be verified, except they repent, *They shall go to the generation of their fathers: where they shall not see light*.

(2.) And how many families are there, tho' not so pro-

fane,
ly, a
their
they
if the
lands
ed th
such
judgr

(3)
yet h
dren,
break
and f
ward
grave
like,
know
rents,
conce

Obj
had li
shall

Solu
a spec
you ha

2. A
wonde
them,
midst

3. A
of your
relation
it in ye

But
and tha
dren;

my dur
And
tion of
fane

fane, who yet breed up their children vainly and sensually, as *Job* 21 11, &c. take no care what becomes of their souls, so they can but provide for their bodies? If they can but teach them to carry their bodies, no matter if the devil act their souls: If they can but leave them lands or monies, they think they have very fully discharged their duties. O what will the language be, wherewith such parents and children shall greet each other at the judgment-seat, and in hell for ever.

(3.) And how many be there, who are more sober, and yet hate the least appearances of godliness in their children, who, instead of cherishing, do all that they can to break bruised reeds, and to quench smoking flax, to stifle and strangle the first appearances and offers they make towards Christ? Who had rather accompany them to their graves, than to Christ, doing all that in them lies, *Herod-like*, to kill Christ in the cradle? Ah Sirs, ye little know, what a mercy ye do or have enjoyed in godly parents, and what a good lot providence cast for you in this concernment of your bodies and souls.

Objection. If any shall say, *This was not their case, they had little help heaven-ward from their parents.* To such I shall reply three things

Solution. 1. If you had little furtherance, yet own it as a special providence, that you had no hinderance: Or, if you had opposition, yet,

2. Admire the grace of God, in plucking you out, by a wonderful distinguishing hand of mercy, from among them, and keeping alive the languishing sparks of grace amidst the floods of opposition.

3. And learn from thence, if God give you a posterity of your own, to be so much the more strict and careful of relational duties, by how much you have felt the want of it in yourselves.

But seeing such a train of blessings, both as to this life and that to come, follow upon an holy education of children; I will not dismiss the point, till I have discharged my duty, in exhorting parents and children to their duties.

And *fell* to you that are *parents*, or to whom the education of children is committed, I beseech you mind, how

concerning a duty lies on you : And that I may effectually press it, consider,

1. How near the relation is betwixt you and your children, and therefore how much you are concerned in their happiness or misery. Consider but the scripture-account of the dearness of such relations, expressed — (1.) By longings for them, as *Gen.* 15. 2. *Gen.* 30. 1. — and (2.) By our joy when we have them, as Christ expresses it, *John* 16. 21. — (3.) The high value set on them, *Gen.* 42. 38. — (4.) The sympathy with them in all their troubles, *Mark* 9. 22 — and (5.) By our sorrow at parting, *Gen.* 37. 35. Now shall all this be to no purpose? For, to what purpose do we desire them before we have them, rejoice in them when we have them, value them so highly, sympathize with them so tenderly, grieve for their death so excessively; if, in the mean time, no care be taken what shall become of them to eternity?

2. How God hath charged you with their souls, as well as bodies: And this appears by two sorts of precepts. (1.) Precepts directly laid upon you, *Deut.* 6. 6, 7. and *Eph.* 6. 4. (2.) By precepts laid on them to obey you, *Eph.* 6. 1. which plainly implies your duty, as well as expresses theirs.

3. What shall comfort you at the parting time, if they die thro' your neglect in a Christless condition? Oh! this is the cutting consideration; My child is in hell, and I did nothing to prevent it; I helped him thither! Duty discharged is the only root of comfort in that day.

4. If you neglect to instruct them in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness? No, no; if you will not teach them to pray, he will to curse, swear and lie. If ground be uncultivated, weeds will spring.

5. If the season of their youth be neglected, how little probability is there of any good fruit afterwards? That is the moulding age, *Prov.* 22. 6. How few are converted in old age! A twig is brought to any form, but grown limbs will not bow.

6. You are instrumental causes of all their spiritual misery; and that, (1.) By generation; (2.) By imitation. They lie spiritually dead of the plague which you brought home

home among them, *Psal. 15. 5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive (or warm) me*

7. There's none in the world so likely as you, to be instruments of their eternal good. You have peculiar advantages that none other hath; as (1.) The interest you have in their affections. (2.) Your opportunities to instil the knowledge of Christ into them, being daily with them, *Deut. 6. 7* (3.) Your knowledge of their tempers: If therefore you neglect, who shall help them?

8. The consideration of the great day should move your bowels of pity for them, O remember that text, *Rev. 20 12., &c I saw the dead small and great stand before God.* What a sad thing will it be, to see your dear children at Christ's left-hand? O friends, do your utmost to prevent this misery: *Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men!*

And, *secondly*, You children, especially that sprang from religious parents, I beseech you obey their counsels, and tread in the steps of their pious examples. To press this, I offer these considerations.

1. Your disobedience to them is a resisting of God's authority, *Eph. 6. 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord:* There's the command. Your rebellion, therefore, runs higher than you think: It is not man, but God, that you disobey; and for your disobedience, God will punish you. It may be, their tenderness will not suffer them, or you are grown beyond their correction; all they can do, is to complain to God: And if so, he will handle you more severely than they could do.

2. Your sin is greater than the sin of young heathens and infidels, and so will your account be also. O better (if a wicked child) that thou hadst been the offspring of savage *Indians*, nay, of beasts, than of such parents. So many counsels disobeyed, hopes and prayers frustrated, will turn to sad aggravations.

3. It is usual with God, to retaliate mens disobedience to their parents in kind: Commonly our own children shall pay us home for it. I have read in a grave author, of a wicked wretch that drag'd his father along the house: The father begg'd him, not to draw him beyond such a

place; for, said he, I drag'd my father no farther. O the sad, but just, retributions of God!

And for you, in whose hearts grace hath been planted by the blessing of education, I beseech you to admire God's goodness to you in this providence. Oh what an happy lot hath God cast for you! How few children are partakers of your mercies!

See that you honour such parents. The tie is double upon you so to do. Be you the joy of their hearts, and comfort of their lives, if living; if not, yet still remember the mercy while you live, and tread in their pious path; that you and they may both rejoice together in the great day, and bless God for each other to all eternity.

The fourth Performance of Providence.

The next remarkable performance of providence for the people of God in which I will instance, shall be, *with respect to its ordering the occasions, instruments and means of their Conversion.*

In nothing doth providence shine forth more gloriously in this world, than it doth in this performance for the people of God. How curiously soever its hand had moulded your bodies, how tenderly soever it had preserved them, and how bountifully soever it had provided for them; if it had not also ordered some means or other for your conversion, all the former favours and benefits it had done for you, had signified little. This, O this! is the most excellent benefit you ever received from its hand. You are more beholden to it for this, than for all your other mercies. And in opening this performance of providence, I cannot but think your hearts must be deeply affected. This is a subject which every gracious heart loves to steep its thoughts in. It is certainly the sweetest history that ever they repeated: They love to think and talk of it. The places where, and instruments by whom, this work was wrought, are exceedingly endeared to them for the work's sake; yea, endeared to that degree, that for many years after their hearts have melted, when they have but passed occasionally by those places, or but seen the faces of those persons that were used as instruments in the hand

of p
Beth
othe
fed
imp
that
wron
more
Bu
displ
the t
whic
prem
some
Co
two
sons
more
years
undis
ueari
as ill
Chris
ible:
remer
godly
to the
they
if the
son th
it are
the su
no rea
of suc
But
are o
time
that
sweet
soul, e

of providence for their good: As no doubt, but *Jacob's Bethel* was ever after that night sweet to his thoughts; so other saints have had their *Bethels* as well as he. O blessed places, times and instruments! O the deep, the sweet impressions, never to be razed out of the memory or heart, that this providence hath made upon those on whom it wrought this blessed effect at years of discretion, and in a more sensible way.

But lest any poor soul should be discouraged under the display of this providence, because he cannot remember the time, place, instruments and manner wherein, and by which, conversion-work was wrought; I will therefore premise this necessary distinction, to prevent injury to some, whilst I design benefit to others.

Conversion, as to the subjects of it, may be considered, two ways: Either as it is more sensibly wrought in persons of riper years, who, in their youthful days, were more prophane and vile; or upon persons in their tender years, into whose hearts grace was more insensibly and undiscernibly instilled by God's blessing upon pious education. In the former sort, the distinct acts of the spirit, as illuminating, convincing, humbling, drawing them to Christ, and sealing them, are more evident and discernible: in the later, more obscure and confused: They can remember, that God gave them an esteem and liking of godly persons, care of duty, and conscience of sin: but as to the time, place, instruments and manner of the work, they can give but a slender account of them. However, if the work be savingly wrought in them, there is no reason they should be troubled, because the circumstances of it are not so evident to them as they are to others. Let the substance and reality of the work appear, and there is no reason to afflict yourselves, because of the invidence of such circumstances.

But yet where the circumstances, as well as substance, are clear to a man, when we call to remembrance the time when, the place where, the instrument by whom, that work was wrought, it must needs be exceeding sweet; and they cannot but yield a fresh delight to the soul, every time they are reflected upon

There are many of the following occasions, which, it may be, we took for stragglers when they first betel us; but they proved scouts sent out from the main body of providence, which they make way for.

Now, there be divers things, in those providences, that are versant about this work, which are exceeding sweet, and taking; as, namely,

First, The wonderful strangeness and unaccountableness of this work of providence, in casting us into the way, and ordering the occasions, yea, the minutest circumstances about this work. Thus you find in *Acts* 8. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, &c. the Eunuch at that very instant, when he was reading the prophet *Isaiah*, hath an interpreter, one among a thousand, that joins his chariot, just as his mind was, by a fit occasion, prepared to receive the first-light of the knowledge of Christ.

And how strange was that change (how far soever this change went) upon *Naaman* the Syrian, recorded *2 Kings* 5. 1, 2, 3, 4.? That the Syrians, in their incursion, should bring away this girl, (likely her beauty was the inducement) and she must be presented to *Naaman's* wife, and relate to her the power of God that accompanied the prophet; tho' you find, in that particular case, there had never been an instance given before, *Luke* 4. 27. Doubtless, the whole of this affair was guided by the signal direction of providence.

So, for the conversion of the *Samaritans*, it is observed, *John* 4. 4. Christ must needs go that way, which lay just in the road betwixt *Judea* and *Galilee*, and at the sixth hour (*i. e.* high noon) he rests himself upon *Jacob's* well, still seeming to have no other design, but his own refreshment, by sitting and drinking there: But! O what a train of blessed providences follow this, which seemed but an accidental thing! first the woman of *Samaria*, and then many more in that city are brought to believe in Christ, as you find *ver.* 29. and 41.

It is noted by *Melchior Adams*, in the life of *Junius*, how very great an athiest he was grown in his younger years; but in order to his conversion to God, first, a wonderful preservation of his life, in a publick tumult at *Lyons* in *France*, must make way, which forces from him the acknow-

ledgement

ledgement of a deity. Then his father sends for him home, and, with much gentleness, persuades him to read the scriptures, he lights upon the first of *John*, and with it he sensibly feels a divine supernatural majesty and power seizing his soul, which brought him over by a compleat conversion to Jesus Christ. Thus, as the woman of *Tekoa* told *David*, *doth God devise means to bring back his banished.*

Lavater tells us, that many *Spanish* soldiers, going into the wars of *Germany*, were there converted to Christ, by falling into the cities and towns where godly ministers and christians were.

Mr. Robert Bolton, though an excellent scholar, yet in his younger years he was a very irreligious person, and a jeerer of holy men; but being cast into the company of godly *Mr. Peacock*, was by him brought to repentance, and proved a famous instrument in the church of Christ.

A scrape of paper accidentally coming to view, hath been used as an occasion of conversion. This was the case of a minister in *Wales*, who had two livings, but took little care of either. He being at a fair, bought something at a pedler's standing, and rent off a leaf of *Mr. Perkins's* catechism to wrap it in; and reading a line or two in it, God set it home, so as it did the work.

The marriage of a godly man into a carnal family, hath been ordered by providence, for the conversion and salvation of many therein. Thus we read in the life of that renowned *English* worthy *Mr. John Bruen*; that, in his second match it was agreed, that he should have one year's diet in his mother-in-law's house: During his abode there, that year (saith *Mr. Clark*) the Lord was pleased, by his means, graciously to work upon her soul, and also upon his wife's sister, and half sister, their brothers *Mr. William* and *Thomas Fox*, with one or two of the servants in that family.

The reading of a good book, hath been the means of bringing others to Christ. And thus we find many of the *German* divines, converted by reading *Luther's* books: Yea, and what is more strange, *Mr. Sleyden* in his commentary tells us, that *Vergerius*, tho' he were present an eye and ear-witness to that doleful case of *Spira*, which one would

think should move a stone, yet still continued so firm to the popes interest, that, when he fell into some suspicion among the cardinals, he resolved to purge himself by writing a book against the *German* apostates, but whilst he read the protestant books out of no other design but to confute them, whilst he is weighing the arguments, is himself convinced and brought to Christ. He finding himself thus overcome by the truth, imparts his conviction to his brother, a zealous papist also: This brother deplores the misery of his case, and seeks to reclaim him; but *Vergerius*, entreating him to weigh well the protestant arguments, he also yields. And so both immediately betook themselves to preach justification by the free grace of God through the blood of Christ:

Yea, not only the reading of a book, or hearing a minister, but (which is most remarkable) the very mistake or forgetfulness of a minister hath been improved by providence for this end and purpose. *Augustine*, once preaching to his congregation, forgot the argument which he first propos'd, and fell upon the error of the *Manichees* beside his first intention: By which discourse he converted one *Firmus* his auditor; who fell down at his feet weeping, and confessing he had lived a *Manichee* many years. Another I knew, who going to preach, took up another bible than that he design'd, in which, not only missing his notes, but the chapter also in which his text lay, was put to some loss thereby; but after a short pause, he resolved to speak to any other scripture that might be presented to him, and accordingly read that text, 2 *Pet.* 3. 9. *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, &c.* And tho' he had nothing prepared, yet the Lord helped him to speak both methodically and pertinently from it: By which discourse, a gracious change was wrought upon one in the congregation, who hath since given good evidence of a sound conversion, and acknowledged this sermon to be the first and only means thereof.

The accompanying of others in a neighbourly civil visit, hath been overruled to the same end. Thus many of the *Jews* accompanied *Mary* in *Bethany* (designing only to manifest their civil respect) but there they met Christ,

saw

saw
11.

M
one
had
in
year
" fr
" an
" of
" &
" m
" to
" h
" w
" c
" h
" fo

T

the
er.
his
Bar
the

T
tion
ous
to
foun
nal
god
this

A
no
suc
fig
the
wh
by
the

saw the things which he did, and believed on him, *John* 11. 55.

Mr. *Firmin* in his *real Christian*, pag 97, 98. tells us of one, who had liv'd many years, in a town, where Christ had been as clearly and as long preached, as in any town in *England*. This man, when he was about seventy six years of age, went to visit a sick neighbour. "A christian friend of mine (*said mine author*) came to see him also; " and finding this old man there, whom he judged to be " one that lived upon his own stock, civility, good works, " &c. he purposely fell into that discourse, to shew how " many persons lived upon their duties, but never came " to Christ. The old man sitting by the bed side, heard " him; and God was pleased to convince him, that he " was such a person, who had lived upon himself with- " out Christ to that day; and would say afterwards, " had I died before threescore and sixteen, I had perished, " for I knew not Christ "

The committing of a godly man to prison, hath been the method of providence, to save the soul of a poor keeper. So *Paul*, *Acts* 16. 26. was made a prisoner, to make his keeper a spiritual free-man. The like success had *Dr. Barnes* in *Queen Mary's* days, who afterwards celebrated the *Lord's Supper* in prison with his converted keeper.

The scattering of ministers and Christians by persecution, from cities and towns, into the ignorant and barbarous parts of the country, hath been the way of providence, to find out and bring home some lost sheep that were found there to Jesus Christ, *Acts* 8. 1. 4. The like signal event hath since followed upon the like scattering of godly ministers, whereof are many pregnant instances at this day.

A servant running away from his master, (likely upon no other design but to live an idle life) yet falling into such places and company as providence ordered (in a design to him unknown) hath thereby been brought to be the servant of Christ. This was the very case of *Onesimus*, who run away from his master *Philemon* to *Rome*; where, by a strange providence (possibly a mere curiosity to see the prisoners) he there falls into *Paul's* hands, who begat

him to Christ in his bonds; *Philemon*, ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

Going to hear a sermon in jest, hath proved some mens conversion in earnest. The abovenamed Mr. *Firmin*, in the fore-cited book, tells us of a notorious drunkard, whom the drunkards called father, that one day would needs go to hear what *Wilson* said, out of no other design, it seems, but to scoff at that holy man: But in the prayer before sermon, his heart began to thaw; and when he read his text, which was, *John*, 5 14 *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*, he could not contain. And in that sermon the Lord changed his heart, tho' so bitter an enemy, that the Minister on lecture days was afraid to go to church before his shop-door *Lo, these are parts of his ways! But how small a portion is known of him?*

The dropping of some grave and weighty word accidentally in the presence of vain carnal persons, the death of an husband, wife or child, a fit of sickness, with a thousand other such like occasions, have been thus improved by providence to the conversion of souls.

And no less remarkable and wonderful are the designs of providence, in ordering the removes, and governing the motions, of ministers, from place to place, in order to the conversion of souls. Thus often-times it carries them to places where they intended not to go; God having (unknown to them) some elect vessels there, who must be called by the gospel.

Thus *Paul* and *Timothy* (a sweet and lovely pair) when they were travelling thro' *Phrygia* and *Galatia*, were forbid to preach the word in *Asia*, to which, probably, their minds inclined, *Acts* 16. 6. And when they essay'd to go into *Bythinia*, the Spirit suffered them not, ver. 7. But a man of *Macedonia* (i. e. an Angel in the shape or habit of a man of that country) appeared to *Paul* in a vision, and prayed him, saying, *come over into Macedonia and help us*, ver. 9. and there did God open the heart of *Lydia*.

I knew a pious minister, now with God; who, falling in his study upon a very rousing subject, intended for his own congregation, was strongly moved, when he had finished it, to go to a rude, vile, prophane people, about five miles off, and first preach it to them; after many wrestlings

lings with himself, not being willing to quench any motion that might be supposed to come from the Spirit of God, he obeyed, and went to this people, who had then no minister of their own, and few durst come among them. And there did the Lord, beyond all expectation, open a door, and several prophane ones received Christ in that place, and engaged this minister to a weekly lecture among them, in which many souls were won to God.

The same holy man, at another time, being upon a journey, passed by a company of vain persons, who were wrestling upon a green near the road: And just as he came against the place, one of them had thrown his antagonist, and stood triumphing in his strength and activity. This good man rode up to them, and turning his speech to this person, told him, friend, I see you are a strong man; but yet let not the strong man glory in his strength: You must know, that you are not to wrestle with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses. How sad will it be, that *Satan* should at last trip up the heels of your hope, and give you an eternal overthrow! And after, a quarter of an hour's serious discourse upon this subject, he left them, and went on his journey. But this discourse made such an impression, that the person had no rest till he opened his trouble to a godly minister, who, wisely following the work upon his soul, saw at last the blessed issue thereof in the gracious change of the person, whereof he afterwards gave the minister a joyful account. O how unsearchable are the methods of providence in this matter!

Nay, what is yet more wonderful, the providence of God hath sometimes ordered the very malice of *Satan*, and wickedness of men, as an occasion of an eternal good to their souls. A very memorable example whereof I shall here give the reader, faithfully relating, what not many years past, fell out in my own observation in this place, to the astonishment of many spectators.

In the year 1673. there came into this port a ship of *Pool*, in her return from *Virginia*; in which ship was one of that place, a lusty young man of twenty-three years of age, who was chirurgeon in the ship. This person, in the voyage, fell into a deep melancholy, which the devil greatly improved

improved to serve his own design for the ruin of this poor man; however, it pleased the Lord to restrain him from any attempts upon his own life, until he arrived here. But shortly after his arrival, upon the *Lord's day*, early in the morning (being in bed with his brother) he took a knife prepared for that purpose, and cut his own throat, and withal leapt out of the bed; and tho' the wound was deep and large, yet thinking it might not soon enough dispatch his wretched life, desperately thrust it into his stomach, and so lay wallowing in his own blood, till his brother awaking, made a cry for help: Hereupon a physician and a chirurgeon coming in, found the wound in his throat mortal; and all they could do at present, was only to stitch it, and apply a plaister, with design, rather to enable him to speak for a little while, than with any expectation of cure; for before that, he breathed through the wound, and his voice was inarticulate.

In this condition I found him that morning; and apprehending him to be within a few minutes of eternity, I laboured to work upon his heart the sense of his condition, telling him, I had but little time do to any thing for him; and therefore desired him to let me know what his own apprehensions of his present condition were. He told me, he hoped in God for eternal life. I replied, that I feared his hopes were ungrounded, for that the scripture tells us, *No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*; but this was self-murder, the grossest of all murders: And insisting upon the aggravation and heinousness of the fact, I perceived his confidence began to fall, and some meltings of heart appeared in him. He then began to lament, with many tears, his sin and misery, and asked me, if there might yet be hope for one that had destroyed himself, and shed his own blood. I replied, The sin indeed is great, but not unpardonable; and if the Lord gave him repentance unto life, and faith to apply Jesus Christ, it should be certainly pardoned to him: and finding him unacquainted with these things, I opened to him the nature and necessity of faith and repentance, which he greedily suck'd in, and with great vehemency cried to God, that he would work them upon his soul, and intreated me also to pray with him and for him, that it might be so. I pray'd
with

with him, and the Lord thaw'd his heart exceedingly in that duty. Loth he was to part with me; but the duties of the day necessitated me to leave him, I briefly summ'd up what was most necessary in my parting counsel to him, and took my leave, never expecting to see him more in this world. But, beyond my own and all mens expectation, he continued all that day, and panted most ardently after Jesus Christ: No discourses pleased him, but Christ and faith; and in this frame I found him in the evening. He rejoiced greatly to see me again, and entreated me to continue my discourses upon these subjects; and after all told me, "Sir, the Lord hath given me repentance for this sin; yea, and for every other sin. I see the evil of sin now, so as I never saw it before. O I lothe myself: I am a vile creature in my own eyes; I do also believe, *Lord help my unbelief.* I am heartily willing to take Christ upon his own terms. One thing only troubles me, I doubt this bloody sin will not be pardoned. Will Jesus Christ (*said he*) apply his blood to me, that have shed my own blood?" I told him, "Christ shed his blood even for them that with wicked hands had shed the blood of Christ; and that was a sin of deeper guilt than his." "Well (*said he*) I will cast my self upon Christ let him do by me what he will." And so I parted with him that night.

Next morning, the wounds were to be opened; and then, the opinion of the chirurgeons was, he would immediately expire.

Accordingly, at his desire, I came that morning, and found him in a most serious frame. I pray'd with him, and then the wound in his stomach was to be opened; but by this time the ventricle itself was swoln out of the orifice of the wound, and lay like a livid discoloured tripe upon his body, and was also cut through; so that all concluded, it was impossible for him to live: However they stich'd the wound in the stomach, enlarged the orifice, and fomented, and wrought it again into his body; and so stitching up the skin, left him to the dispose of providence.

But so it was, that both the deep wound in his throat, and this in his stomach healed: And the more dangerous wound

wound sin had made upon his soul was, I trust, effectually healed also. I spent many hours with him in that sickness; and after his return home, received this account from Mr. Samuel Hardy, a minister in that town. Part whereof I shall transcribe.

Dear Sir,

I Was much troubled at the sad providence in your town; but did much rejoice, that he fell into such hands for his body and soul. You have taken much pains with him; and I hope to good purpose. I think, if ever a great and thorough work were ever done such a way, it is now; and if never the like, I am persuaded now it is. Never grow weary of such good works. One such instance is (methinks) enough to make you abound in the work of the Lord all your days, &c. &c.

O how unsearchable are the ways of providence, in leading men to Christ! Let none be encouraged by this to sin, that grace may abound. These are the rare and singular instances of the mercy of God, and such as no presumptuous sinner can expect to find. It is only recited here to the honour of providence, which works for the recovery of sinners in ways that we understand not. O what a fetch hath providence beyond our understandings!

2dly, And, as it orders very strange occasions to awaken and rouse souls at first; so it works no less wonderfully in carrying on the work to perfection: And this it doth two ways.

1. By quickning and reviving dying convictions and troubles for sin. Souls, after their first awakenings, are apt to lose the sense and impression of their first troubles for sin, but providence is vigilant to prevent it; and doth effectually prevent it, sometimes by directing the minister to some discourse or passage, that shall fall as pat as if the case of such a person had been studied by him, and designedly spoken to. How often have I found this in the cases of many souls, who have professed they have stood amazed, to hear the very thoughts of their hearts discovered by the preacher, who knew nothing of them! Sometimes, by directing them to some proper rousing scripture, that suits their present case; and sometimes, by suffering them

them to fall into some new sin, which shall awaken all their former troubles again, and put a new efficacy and activity into the conscience. The world is full of instances in all these cases; and, because most Christians have experience of these things in themselves, it will be needless to recite them here. Search but a few years back, and you may remember, that according to this account (at least in some particulars) providence ordered the matter with you. Have you not found some rod or other, prepared by providence to rouse you out of your security? Why? This is so common a thing among Christians, that they many times presage an affliction coming from the frames they find their own hearts in.

2. It gives also great assistance to the work of the Spirit upon the soul, by ordering, supporting relieving and cheering means, to prop up and comfort the soul, when it is overburdened, and ready to sink in the deeps of troubles. I remember Mr. Bolton gives us one instance which fits both these cases, the reviving of convictions, and seasonable supports in the deeps of troubles. And it is of a person that by convictions had been fetch'd off from his wicked companions, and entered into a reformed course of life; but after this, thro' the inticement of his old companions, the subtilty of Satan and corruption of his own heart, did again relapse into the ways of sin. Then was providentially brought to his view that scripture, *Prov* 1. 24. 25. 26 &c This renewed his trouble, yea, aggravated it to a greater height than ever: insomuch that he could scarcely think (as it seems by the relation) his sin could be pardoned. But in this plunge, that text *Luke* 17. 4. was presented to him, which sweetly settled him in a sure and glorious peace.

Nor can we here forget that miraculous work of providence, in a time of great extremity, which was wrought for that good gentlewoman Mrs. Honeywood, (and is somewhere mentioned by the same author) who under a deep and sad desertion, refused and put off all comfort, seeming to despair utterly of the grace and mercy of God. A worthy minister being one day with her, and reasoning against her desperate conclusions, she took a *Venice-glass* from

wound sin had made upon his soul was, I trust, effectually healed also. I spent many hours with him in that sickness; and after his return home, received this account from Mr. Samuel Hardy, a minister in that town. Part whereof I shall transcribe.

Dear Sir,

I Was much troubled at the sad providence in your town; but did much rejoice, that he fell into such hands for his body and soul. You have taken much pains with him; and I hope to good purpose. I think, if ever a great and thorow work were ever done such a way, it is now; and if never the like, I am perswaded now it is. Never grow weary of such good works. One such instance is (methinks) enough to make you abound in the work of the Lord all your days, &c. &c.

O how unsearchable are the ways of providence, in leading men to Christ! Let none be encouraged by this to sin, that grace may abound. These are the rare and singular instances of the mercy of God, and such as no presumptuous sinner can expect to find. It is only recited here to the honour of providence, which works for the recovery of sinners in ways that we understand not. O what a fetch hath providence beyond our understandings!

2dly, And, as it orders very strange occasions to awaken and rouse souls at first; so it works no less wonderfully in carrying on the work to perfection: And this it doth two ways.

1 By quickning and reviving dying convictions and troubles for sin. Souls, after their first awakenings, are apt to lose the sense and impression of their first troubles for sin; but providence is vigilant to prevent it; and doth effectually prevent it, sometimes by directing the minister to some discourse or passage, that shall fall as pat as if the case of such a person had been studied by him, and designedly spoken to. How often have I found this in the cases of many souls, who have professed they have stood amazed, to hear the very thoughts of their hearts discovered by the preacher, who knew nothing of them! Sometimes, by directing them to some proper rousing scripture, that suits their present case; and sometimes, by suffering them

them
their
activi
stance
have
needl
back
count
matte
prepa
Why
they
frame

2.

rit u
and
when
deep
insta
victi
And
off f
form
his c
of h
The
ure,
grav
coul
coul
17.
a sun
N
deno
for
whe
and
ing
wor
gain

them to fall into some new sin, which shall awaken all their former troubles again, and put a new efficacy and activity into the conscience. The world is full of instances in all these cases; and, because most Christians have experience of these things in themselves, it will be needless to recite them here. Search but a few years back, and you may remember, that according to this account (at least in some particulars) providence ordered the matter with you. Have you not found some rod or other, prepared by providence to rouse you out of your security? Why? This is so common a thing among Christians, that they many times preface an affliction coming from the frames they find their own hearts in.

2. It gives also great assistance to the work of the Spirit upon the soul, by ordering, supporting relieving and cheering means, to prop up and comfort the soul, when it is overburdened, and ready to sink in the deeps of troubles. I remember Mr. Bolton gives us one instance which fits both these cases, the reviving of convictions, and seasonable supports in the deeps of troubles. And it is of a person that by convictions had been fetch'd off from his wicked companions, and entered into a reformed course of life; but after this, thro' the inticement of his old companions, the subtilty of Satan and corruption of his own heart, did again relapse into the ways of sin. Then was providentially brought to his view that scripture, *Prov* 1. 24. 25. 26 &c This renewed his rouble, yea, aggravated it to a greater height than ever: insomuch that he could scarcely think (as it seems by the relation) his sin could be pardoned. But in this plunge, that text *Luke* 17. 4. was presented to him, which sweetly settled him in a sure and glorious peace.

Nor can we here forget that miraculous work of providence, in a time of great extremity, which was wrought for that good gentlewoman Mrs. Honeywood, (and is somewhere mentioned by the same author) who under a deep and sad desertion, refused and put off all comfort, seeming to despair utterly of the grace and mercy of God. A worthy minister being one day with her, and reasoning against her desperate conclusions, she took a *Venice-glass* from

from the table, and said, Sir, I am as sure to be damned, as this glass is to be broken; and therewith threw it forcibly to the ground. But to the astonishment of both, the glass remained whole and sound, which the minister taking up with admiration, rebuked her presumption, and shewed her what a wonder providence had wrought for her satisfaction, and it greatly altered the temper of her mind. O how unsearchable are his ways, and his paths past finding out! Lo, these are part of his ways; but how small a portion of them do we know.

And now suffer me a little to expostulate with thy soul, reader; hast thou been duly sensible of thy obligation to providence for this inestimable favour? O what hath it done for thee! there are divers kinds of mercies conveyed to men by the hand of providence, but none like this; in all the treasury of its benefits, none is found like this. Did it cast thee into the way of conversion, and order the means and occasions of it for thee, when thou little thoughtest of any such thing? How dear and sweet should the remembrance of it be to thy soul! Methinks, it should astonish and melt you every time you reflect upon it! Such mercies should never grow stale, or look like common things to you: For do but seriously consider the following particulars.

1. How surprizing the mercy was, which it performed for you in that day. Providence had a design upon you for your eternal good, which ye understood not. The time of mercy was now fully come; the decree was now ready to bring forth that mercy, with which it had gone big from eternity, and its gracious design must be executed by the hand of providence, so far as concerned the external means and instruments: and how aptly did it cause all things to fall in with that design, tho' you knew not the meaning of it? look over all the before-mentioned examples, and you shall see the blessed work of conversion begun upon those souls, when they minded it no more, than *Saul* did a kingdom, that morning he went out to seek his father's asses, *1 Sam. 9. 3, 20*. Providence might truly have said to you in that day, as *Christ* said to *Peter*, *John 13. 7. What I do, thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt*

shalt know
heaven.
ours, and
when
as he
upon
his G
some
you w
not w
cus ar

2.

usher
the m
of tin
broug
the ac
ance,
set in
hundr
becau
were,
and p
before
that r
many
4. 27.
but to
Syria
side y
of the
sed pr
time
W
ally
of all
to the
well
pleasu
The
sings

shalt know it. *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; but, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than ours, and his ways than our ways.* Little did Zaccheus think, when he climbed up into the Sycamore-tree, to see Christ as he passed that way, what a design of mercy Christ had upon him, who took thence the occasion of becoming both his Guest and Saviour, *Luke 19. 5, 6, 7, 8.* And as little did some of you think what the aim of providence was, when you went (some out of custom, others out of curiosity, if not worse ends) to hear such a sermon. O how stupendous are the ways of God!

2. What a distinguishing and seasonable mercy was usher'd in by providence in that day. It brought you to the means of salvation in a good hour. At that very nick of time, when the Angel troubled the waters, you were brought to the pool; to allude to that, *John 5. 4.* Now the accepted day was come, the Spirit was in the ordinance, or providence, that converted you, and you were set in the way of it. It may be, you had heard many hundred sermons before, but nothing would stick till now, because the hour was not come. The Lord did, as it were, call in the word for such a man, such a woman; and providence said, Lord, here he is, I have brought him before thee. There were many others under that sermon, that received no such mercy. You yourselves had heard many before, but not to that advantage, as it is said, *Luke 4. 27. There were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elizeus, but to none of them was the prophet sent, save unto Naaman the Syrian.* So there were many poor unconverted souls beside you under the word that day, and it may be, to none of them was salvation sent that day, but to you. O blessed providence, that set you in the way of mercy at that time.

What a weighty and important matter was providentially directed to your souls that day. There are mercies of all sizes and kinds in the hand of providence to dispense to the sons of men: Its left hand is full of blessings, as well as its right. It hath health and riches, honours and pleasures, as well as Christ and salvation to dispense. The world is full of its left-hand favours; but the blessings of its right-hand are invaluablely precious, and few there

there be that receive them. It doth thousands of kind of fices for men; but among them all, this is the chiefest, to lead and direct them to Christ. For consider,

(1.) Of all mercies, this comes thro' most and greatest difficulties, *Eph. 1. 19, 20.*

(2.) This is a spiritual mercy, excelling in dignity of nature all others, more than gold excels the dirt under your feet, *Rev. 3. 18.* One such gift is worth thousands of other mercies.

(3.) This is a mercy, immediately flowing out of the fountain of God's electing love; a mercy never dropt into any, but an elect vessel, *1 Theff. 1. 4, 5.*

(4.) This is a mercy that infallibly secures salvation; for, as we may argue from conversion to election, looking back, so from conversion to salvation, looking forward, *Heb. 6. 9.*

(5.) *Lastly*, This is an eternal mercy, that which will stick by you, when father, mother, wife, children, estate, honours, health and life shall fail thee, *John 4. 14.*

O therefore set a special mark upon that providence, that set you in the way of this mercy! It hath performed that for thee, which all the ministers on earth, and angels in heaven, could never have performed. This is a mercy, that puts weight and value into the smallest circumstance that relates to it.

The fifth performance of Providence.

Thus you hear how instrumental providence hath been, in ordering the means and occasions of the greatest mercies of your souls. Let us now take into consideration, another excellent performance of providence, respecting the good of your bodies and souls too, *in respect of that employment and calling it hath ordered for you in this world*; for it hath not only an eye upon your well-being in the world to come; but upon your well-being in this world also; and that very much depends upon the station and vocation to which it calls you.

Now the providence of God, with respect to our civil callings, may be display'd very takingly in the following particulars,

1. In

1. suffering
ny do
nati,
figure
in swea
Theff.
is plain
God p
of the
able n
3. 12.
they a
others
ceive.

2. the w
suitab
ful tr
They
ry im
factor
Ephes
19. 2.
withi
The
our o
arts a
of pe
pride
No
you d
small
Bu
nius
creat
streng
have
but
ling
live.

1. In directing you to a calling in your youth, and not suffering you to live an idle, useles and sinful life, as many do, who are but burdens to the earth, *fruges consumere nati*, the wens of the body politick, serving only to disfigure and drain it, to eat what others earn. Sin brought in sweat, *Gen. 3. 19.* but now, not to sweat increaseth sin, *2 Theff. 3. 12.* He that lives idly cannot live honestly, as is plainly enough intimated, *1 Theff. 4. 11, 12.* But when God puts men into a lawful calling, wherein the labours of their hands or heads is sufficient for them, it is a valuable mercy; for thereby they *eat their own bread*, *-2 Theff. 3. 12.* Many a sad temptation is happily prevented; and they are ordinarily furnished by it for works of mercy to others; and surely, it is more blessed to give, than to receive.

2. In ordering you to such callings and employments in the world, as are not only lawful in themselves, but most suitable to you. There be many persons employed in sinful trades and arts, merely to furnish other mens lusts: They do not only sin in their employments, but their very employments are sinful; they trade for hell, and are factors for the devil. *Demetrius* and the crafts-men at *Ephesus* got their estates by making shrines for *Diana*, *Acts 19. 24, 25. i. e.* little cases or boxes, with folding leaves, within which the image of that idol sat enshrined. These were carried about by people in procession, in honour of their idol. And at this day, how many wicked arts and employments are there invented, (and multitudes of persons maintained by them) merely to gratify the pride and wantonness of a debauched age.

Now to have an honest lawful employment, wherein you do not dishonour God in benefiting yourselves, is no small mercy.

But if it be not only lawful in itself, but suited to your genius and strength, there is a double mercy in it. Some poor creatures are engaged in callings, that eat up their time and strength, &c. makes their lives very uncomfortable to them. they have not only spending and wasting employments in the world, but such as allow them little or no time for their general calling; and yet all this doth but keep them and theirs alive. Oh! therefore, if God have fitted you with an honest

nest employment, wherein you have less toil than others, and more time for heavenly exercises, ascribe this benefit to the special care of providence for you!

3. In settling you in such an employment and calling in the world, as, possibly, neither yourselves nor parents could ever expect you should arrive to. There are among us such persons as, on this account, are signally obliged to divine providence. God hath put them into such a way, as neither they nor their parents ever projected. For look; as the *flower-de-luce* in the compass turns now this way, then that way, and never ceases moving, till it settle to the *north-point*; just so is it in our settlement in the world. A child is now designed for this, then for that, but at last settles in that way of employment which providence designed him to. How strangely are things wheeled about by providence! Not what we, or our parents, but what God design'd shall take place. *Amos* was very meanly employed at first, but God designed him for a more honourable and comfortable calling, *Amos* 7. 14, 15. *David* followed the ewes, and likely never raised his thoughts to higher things in the days of his youth; but God made him the royal shepherd of a better flock, *Pf* 78. 70, 71. *Peter* and *Andrew* were employed as *fisher-men*, but *Christ* calls them from that to an higher calling, *Matth.* 4. 18, 19. to be *fishers of men*. *Pareus* when he was fourteen years old, was, by the instigation of his step-mother, placed with an apothecary; but providence so wrought, that he was taken off from that and fitted for the ministry, wherein he became a fruitful and eminent instrument to the church. *James Andreas* was, by reason of his father's inability to keep him at school, designed for a carpenter, but was afterwards, by the persuasion of friends, and assistance of the church-stuck to *Stutgard*, and thence to the university, and so arrived at a very eminent station of service to the church. A master-butler *Oecolampadius* was by his father, designed for a merchant; but his mother by earnest entreaties, prevailed to keep him at school, and this man was a blessed instrument in the reformation of religion. I might easily cite multitudes of such instances; but a taste may suffice.

4. In
thou not
is the e
by its fa

5. In
the pray
his han
yours b
no stren
but no
for the
God ble
sary sup
provide
ed.

Objec
altho
which
ploy in
I.
be the
if you
tempta
which
you se

2.
en,
Ecclef.
whet be
not suff
3
al
ve
spies
than y

Obj
cure m
and l

4. In securing your estates from ruin, *Job, 1. 10. Hast thou not made an hedge about him and all that he hath?* This is the enclosure of providence, which secures to us, what by its favour, we acquire in the way of honest industry.

5. In making your calling sufficient for you. It was the prayer of *Moses* for the tribe of *Judah*, *Deut. 33. 7. Let his hands be sufficient for him;* and it is no small mercy if yours be so to you. Some there be, that have work, but no strength to go through with it; others have strength, but no employment for it. Some have hands, and work for them; but it is not sufficient for them and theirs. If God bless your labours, so as to give you and yours necessary supports and comfort in the world by it, it is a choice providence, and with all thankfulness to be acknowledged.

Object. 1. If any that fear God, shall complain, *That altho' they have a calling, yet it is an hard and labourious one, which takes up too much of their time, which they would gladly imploy in other and better work;* I answer,

1. 'Tis like, the wisdom of providence foresaw this to be the most suitable and proper imployment for you; and if you had more ease and rest, you might have more temptations than now you have: The strength and time which is now taken up in your daily labours, wherein you serve God, might otherwise have been spent upon pleasures, wherein you might have served the devil.

2. It may be, your health is the better preserved, and your refreshments made the sweeter for you, *Eccles. 5. 12. The sleep of a labouring man is sweet unto him, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

3. And as to the service of God, if your hearts be spiritual, you may enjoy much communion with God in your employments, and you have some intervals and respites for that purpose. Have you not more spare hours, than you imploy to that end?

Object. 2. But all my labours will scarcely suffice, to procure me and mine the necessaries of life. I am kept short and low to what others are; and this is a sad affliction.

Solution.

Solution. Tho' the wisdom of providence hath ordered you a lower and poorer condition than others; yet, (1.) Consider how many there be, that are lower than you in the world; you have but little of the world, yet others have less. Read the description of those persons, *Job. 30. 4. &c.* (2.) If God have given you but a small portion of the world; yet, if you be godly, he hath promised never to forsake you, *Heb. 13. 5.* (3.) Providence hath ordered that condition for you, which is really best for your eternal good. If you had more of the world than you have, your heads and hearts might not be able to manage it to your advantage: A small boat must have but a narrow sail. You have not wanted hitherto the necessaries of life, and are commanded, *having food and raiment (tho' none of the finest) to be therewith content. A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked, Psal. 37. 16.* better in the acquisition, sweeter in the fruition, and more comfortable in the account.

Well then, if providence hath so disposed of you all, that you can eat your own bread, and so advantageously directed some of you to employments, that afford not only necessaries for yourselves and families, but an overplus for works of mercy to others, and all this brought about for you in a way you did not project; let God be owned, and honoured in his providence. Will you not henceforth call him, *my Father, the guide of my youth?* As it is *Jer. 3. 4.* Surely, it was the Lord that guided you to settle, as you did, in those days of your youth: You reap at this day, and may to your last day, the fruits of those early providences in your youth.

Now, see that you walk answerably to the obligations of providence in this particular; and see to it, in the fear of God, that you abuse not any of these things to his dishonour, which he hath wrought for your comfort. To prevent which, I will here drop a few needful cautions, and shut up this particular.

1. *Caution.* Be not slothful and idle in your vocations. It is said, *Augustus* built an *Apragapolis*, a city void of business; but I am sure God never erected any city, town or family

famil
no do
back
Theff.
And

2.

lings,
Bewar
earthl

9. But

into m

and per

Athens

it, and

ed, th

the isl

is obvi

me-tra

busine

3. C

lings

human

the Lo

wealth

knowl

him, an

Thou ha

fore yo

4, 5.

the des

also in

that w

a bless

4. C

ment i

much

very m

Provid

hath s

you co

family to that end. The command to *Adam*, Gen. 3. 19. no doubt reaches all his posterity: and gospel-commands back and second it upon Christians, Rom. 12. 11. and 1 Thess. 4. 11. If you be negligent, you cannot be innocent. And yet,

2. *Caution* Be not so intent upon your particular callings, as to make them interfere with your general calling. Beware you lose not your God in the crowd and hurry of earthly business. Mind that solemn warning, 1 Tim. 6. 9. *But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* The inhabitants of *OEnoe*, a dry island near *Athens*, bestowed much labour to draw in a river to water it, and make it fruitful; but when the sluices were opened, the water flowed so abundantly, that it overflowed the island, and drowned the inhabitants. The application is obvious. It was an excellent saying of *Seneca*, *Rebus non me trado, sed commodo.* I don't give, but lend myself to business.

3. *Caution* Remember always the success of your callings and earthly employments is by divine blessing, not humane diligence alone; Deut. 8. 18. *Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.* The devil himself was so far orthodox, as to acknowledge it, Job 1. 10. *Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, &c.* Recommend therefore your affairs to God by prayer, according to Psal. 37. 4, 5. *Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.* And touch not with that which you cannot recommend to God by prayer for a blessing.

4. *Caution* Be well satisfied in that station and employment in which providence hath placed you; and do not so much as wish yourselves in another, 1 Cor. 7. 20. *Let every man abide in the same calling, wherein he was called.* Providence is wiser than you; and you may be confident hath suited all things better to your eternal good, than you could do, had you been left to your own option.

The

The Sixth Performance of Providence.

Thus you see the care providence hath had over you in your youth in respect of that civil imployment to which it guided us in those days.

We will, in the next place, consider it as our guide, and the orderer of our relations for us. That providence hath a special hand in this matter, is evident both from scripture assertions, and the acknowledgments of holy men, who, in that great concernment of their lives, have still owned, and acknowledged the directing hand of providence. Take an instance of both. The scripture plainly asserts the dominion of providence over this affair in *Prov. 19. 14. A prudent wife is from the Lord: And Prov. 18. 22. Who so findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.* So for children, see *Psal. 127. 3. Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*

And it hath ever been the practice of holy men, to seek the Lord for direction and counsel, when they have been upon the change of their condition. No doubt, but *Abraham's* encouragement in that case, was the fruit of prayer, *Gen. 24. 7.* His pious servant also, who was imployed in that affair, did both earnestly seek counsel of God, *Gen. 24. 12.* and thankfully acknowledge his gracious providence in guiding it, *ver. 26. 27.*

The same we may observe in children, the fruit of marriage, *1 Sam. 1. 20. Luke 1. 13, 15.* Now, the providence of God may be divers ways displayed for the engaging of our hearts in love to the God of our mercies.—As,

1. There is very much of providence seen in appointing the parties each for other. In this, the Lord goes oftentimes beyond our thoughts and projections, yea, and oftentimes crosses mens desires and designs to their great advantage. Not what they fancy, but what his infinite wisdom judges best, and most beneficial for them, takes place. Hence it is, that probabilities are so often dashed; and things remote and utterly improbable are brought about, in very strange and unaccountable methods of providence.

2. There

The Mystery of Providence.

61

2. There is much of providence seen in the harmony and agreeableness of tempers and dispositions, from whence a very great part of the tranquillity and comforts of our lives results: Or, at least, tho' natural tempers and educations did not so much harmonize before, yet they do so after they come under the ordinance of God; *Gen. 2. 24. They two shall be one flesh*; not obly one in respect of God's institution, but one in respect of love and affection; that those, who so lately were mere strangers to each other, are now endeared to a degree beyond the nearest relations in blood. *Vide supra*; *For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.*

3. But especially, providence is remarkable, in making one instrumental to the eternal good of the other. *1 Cor. 7. 16. How knowest thou, O wife, but thou mayst save thy husband* Or, *How knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife*? Hence is that grave exhortation to the wives of unbelieving husbands, *1 Pet. 3. 1.* to win them by their conversation, which should be to them instead of an ordinance.

Or, if both be gracious, then what singular assistance and mutual help is hereby gained to the furtherance of their eternal good? Whilst they live together *as heirs of the grace of life, 1 Pet. 3. 7.* O blessed providence, that directed such into so intimate relation on earth, who shall inherit together the common salvation in heaven.

4. How much of providence is seen in children the fruit of marriage? To have any posterity in the earth, and not be left altogether as a dry tree; to have comfort and joy in them, is a special providence, importing a special mercy to us. To have the breaches made upon our families repaired, is a providence to be owned with a thankful heart. When God shall say to a man, as he speaks in another case to the church, *Isa. 49. 20. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, the place is too strait for me, &c.*

And these providences will appear more affectingly sweet and lovely to you, if you but compare its allotments to you, with what it hath allotted to many others in the world. Do but look abroad, and you shall find.

D

(1.) Multitudes

There

(1.) Multitudes unequally yoked, to the imbittering of their lives, whose relations are clogs and hindrances both in temporals and spirituals. Yea, we find an account in scripture of graceless persons, a great part of whose comfort in this world hath been split upon this rock. *Abigail* was a discreet and virtuous woman, but very unsuitably married to a churlish *Nabal*; see *1 Sam.* 25. 25. What a temptation, to the neglect of a known duty, prevail'd upon the renowned *Moses*, by the means of *Zipporah* his wife? *Exod.* 4. 24, 25. *David* had his scoffing *Michal*, *2 Sam.* 6. 20. And patient *Job*, no small addition to all his other afflictions from the wife of his bosom, who should have been a support to him in the day of his trouble *Job*, 19. 17.

No doubt, but God sanctifies such rods to his peoples good. If *Socrates* knew how to improve his afflictions in his *Xanthippe* to the increase of his patience, much more will they, who converse with God under all providences, whether sweet or bitter. Nevertheless this must be acknowledged to be a sad stroke upon any person, and such as maims them upon the working hand, by unfitting them for duty, *1 Pet.* 3. 7. and cuts off much of the comfort of life also.

(2.) How many are there, who never enjoy the comfortable fruits of marriage? but are denied the sight, at least the enjoyment of children, *Jer.* 22. 30. Thus saith the Lord, Write this man childless, &c. or if they have children, yet cannot enjoy them, *Hos.* 9. 12. Though they bring up children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left, who only bear for the grave, and have their expectations raised for a greater affliction to themselves.

(3.) And it is no rare or unusual thing to see children and near relations, the greatest instruments of affliction to their parents and friends; so that, after all their other sorrows and troubles in the world, nearest relations bring up the of rear sorrows, and prove greater griefs than any other. How many parents have complained, with the tree in the fable, that their very hearts have been rived asunder with those wedges that were cut out of their own bodies. What a grief was *Esau* to *Isaac* and *Rebekah*, *Gen.* 26. 34. 35. What a scourge were *Absalom* and *Amnon* to *David*.

We
Psal. 6
comf
and r
engage
And r
agreea
take u

1. A
works
ing, go
ed all
way of
rect his
but wh
come t
father
With m
am beco
and mo
and of a

2. B
which
not the
Lord e
aggrava
great lo
ly relat

3. In
them.
study to
your rel
will sho
the sen
will giv

7

You
its part
were fol

Well then, if God have *set the solitary in families*, as it is *Psal. 68. 6.* built an house for the desolate, given you comfortable relations, which are springs of daily comfort and refreshment to you; you are, upon many accounts, engaged to walk answerably to these gracious providences. And that you may understand wherein that decorum and agreeable comportment with these providences consists, take up the sense of your duty in these brief hints.

1. Ascribe to God the glory of all those providential works which yield you comfort. You see a wise, directing, governing providence, which hath disposed and ordered all things beyond your own projects and designs. *The way of man is not in himself, nor is it in him that walketh to direct his own steps, Jer. 10. 23.* Not what you projected, but what an higher counsel than yours determined, is come to pass. Good *Jacob*, when God had made him the father of a family, admired God in the mercy, *Gen. 32. 10. With my staff (said he) I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.* And how doth this mercy humble and melt him? *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant.*

2. Be exact in discharging the duties of those relations, which so gracious a providence hath led you into. Abuse not the effects of so much mercy and love to you. The Lord expects praise wherever you have comfort. This aggravated *David's* sin, that he should dare to abuse so great love and mercy, as God had shewn him in his family relations, *2 Sam. 12. 7, 8, 9.*

3. Improve relations to the end providence designed them. Walk together as co-heirs of the grace of life; study to be mutual blessings to each other: So walk in your relations, that the parting-day may be sweet. Death will shortly break up the family; and then nothing, but the sense of duty discharged, or the neglects pardoned, will give comfort.

The Seventh Performance of Providence

You have heard how well providence hath performed its part for you, in planting you into families who once were solitary. Now let us, in the next place, view another

gracious performance of providence for us, in making provision from time to time for us and our families. I the rather put these providences together in this place, because I find the scripture doth so, *Psal. 107. 41. He setteth the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.*

You know the promises God hath made to his people, *Psal. 34. 10. The young lions shall lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.* And have you not also seen the constant performance of it? Cannot you give the same answer, if the same question were propounded to you, that the disciples did, *Luke 22. 35. Since I sent you forth, lacked ye any thing? and they said nothing? Can ye not with Jacob, call him, The God that fed you all your life long? Gen. 48. 15. Surely he hath given bread to them that fear him, and been ever mindful of his covenant, Psal. 111. 5.*

To display this providence, we will consider it in the following particulars.

1. The assiduity and constancy of the care of providence for the saints, *Lam. 3. 23. His mercies are new every morning.* It is not the supply of one or two pressing needs, but all your wants, as they grow from day to day thro' all your days, *Gen. 48. 15. The God that fed me all my life long.* The care of providence runs parallel with the line of life. See *Isa. 46. 3, 4. Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb. And even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you. So that, as God bid Israel, Micah 6. 5. To remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that they might know the righteousness of the Lord; so would I perswade thee, reader, to record the ways of providence, from first to last, throughout thy whole course to this day, that thou mayst see what a God he hath been to thee.*

2. The seasonableness and opportuneness of its provisions for them: For so runs the promise, *Isa. 41. 17. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them; and so hath the performance of it been. And this hath been made good to distressed saints,*

someti
a little
us of
secret
it is th
that th
way, i
Kings
not.

Mr.
humbl
able in
the end
where
him, or
gan to
shrub,
his eye
every o
came o
thrust a
be of g
from hi
himself
hand, a
days af
in her
then un

Mr.
have m
to the
pregnan
"For n
"seen
"things
"there
"culiar
"much
"mire
"a jon
"luffe

some-

Sometimes in a more ordinary way, God secretly blessing a little, and making it sufficient for us and ours: *Job* tells us of the secret of God upon his tabernacle, *Job* 29. 4. i. e. his secret blessing is in their tabernacles, by reason whereof it is that they subsist: But it is in an unaccountable way, that they do so. And sometimes, in an extraordinary way, it breaks forth for their supply. So you find in 2 *Kings* 17. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. the cruse and barrel fail nor.

Mr. *Samuel Clarke*, in the life of that painful and humble servant of Christ, Mr. *John Fox*, records a memorable instance of providence, and it is this; that, towards the end of King *Henry VII.* his reign, he went to *London*, where he quickly spent that little his friends had given him, or he had acquired by his own diligence; and began to be in great want. As one day he sat in *St. Paul's church*, spent with long fasting, his countenance thin, and his eyes hollow, after the ghastful manner of dying men, every one shunning a spectacle of so much horror; there came one to him, whom he had never seen before, and thrust an untold sum of money into his hand, bidding him be of good cheer, and accept that small gift in good part from his countryman; and that he should make much of himself, for that within a few days new hopes were at hand, and more certain condition of livelihood. Three days after, the *Duchess of Richmond* sent for him to live in her house, and be tutor to the *Earl of Surrey's* children, then under her care.

Mr. *Isaac Ambrose*, a worthy divine, whose labours have made him acceptable to his generation, in his epistle to the *Earl of Bedford*, prefixed to his *Last Things*, gives a pregnant instance in his own case: His words are these; "For mine own part, (saith he) however the Lord hath seen cause to give me but a poor pittance of outward things, for which I bless his name; yet, in the income thereof, I have many times observed to much of his peculiar providence, that thereby they have been very much sweetened, and my heart hath been raised to admire his grace. When of late under an hard dispensation, (which I judge not meet to mention, wherein I suffered conscientiously) all streams of wonted supplies
D 3 " being

"being stop'd, the waters of relief for myself and family
 "did run low: I went to bed with some staggerings and
 "doubtings of the fountain's letting out itself for our re-
 "freshing, but e'er I did awake in the morning, a letter
 "was brought to my bed-side, which was signed by a
 "choice friend, Mr. *Anthony Ash*, which reported some
 "unexpected breakings out of God's goodness for my com-
 "fort:" *These are some of his lines;—Your God, who hath*
given you an heart thankfully to record your experiences of his
goodness, doth renew experiences for your encouragement. Now I
shall report one, which will raise your spirit toward the God of your
mercies. Whereupon he sweetly concludes, "One morsel
 "of God's provision, especially when it comes in un-
 "expected, and upon prayer, when wants are most, will
 "be more sweet to a spiritual relish, than all former en-
 "joyments were."

3. The wisdom of providence in our provisions. And
 this is discovered in two things: (1.) In proportioning
 the quantity, not satisfying our extravagant wishes, but
 answering our real needs; consulting our wants, not
 not our own wantonness, *Phil. 4. 19. My God shall supply*
all your wants; and this hath exactly suited the wishes
 of the best and wisest men, who desired no more at its hand.
 So *Jacob, Gen. 28. 20.* and *Agur, Prov. 30. 8, 9.* Wise
 providence considers our condition as pilgrims and stran-
 gers, and so allots the *viaticum* provision, that is needful
 for our passage home. It knows the mischievous influence
 of fulness and redundancy upon most men, tho' sanctified,
 and how apt it is to make them remiss and forgetful of
 God, *Deut. 6. 12.* that their hearts, like the moon, suffers
 an eclipse when it is at the full; and so suits and orders
 all to their best advantage. (2.) Its wisdom is much dis-
 covered in the manner of dispensing our portion to us.
 It many times suffers our wants to pinch hard, and many
 fears to arise, out of design to magnify the care and love
 of God in the supply, *Deut. 8. 3.* Providence so orders the
 case, that faith and prayer coming betwixt our wants and
 supplies, the goodness of God may be the more magnified
 in our eyes thereby.

And

And
 provid
 you an
 to: An
 such n
 suitable

(1.)
 of pro
 fruits a
 Israel, I
 A bad
 comfor
 due for

(2.)
 Thus r
 the wat
 bread a
 sonable
 ly after
 traordin

(3.)
 This is
 wants
 derstan
 mire th
 edness
 there l
 to rew
 Gen. 32

(4.)
 portion
 be wel
 Say as
 places;
 you, w
 yoursel

(5.)
 You fee
 ir; the
 need."

And now let me beg you to consider the good hand of providence, that hath provided for, and suitably supplied you and yours all your days, and never failed you hitherto: And labour to walk suitably to your experiences of such mercies. In order whereunto, let me press a few suitable cautions upon you.

(1.) Beware, that you forget not the care and kindness of providence, which your eyes have seen in so many fruits and experiences thereof. It was God's charge against Israel, Psal. 106. 13. *That they soon forgot his wondrous works.* A bad heart and a slippery memory deprive men of the comfort of many mercies, and defraud God of the glory due for them.

(2.) Do not distrust providence in future exigencies. Thus they did, Psal. 78. 20. *Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed: Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?* How unreasonable and absurd are these queries of unbelief, especially after their eyes had seen the power of God in such extraordinary effects?

(3.) Do not murmur and regret under new strains. This is a vile temper; and yet how incident to us, when wants press hard upon us! Ah! did we but rightly understand what the demerit of sin is, we would rather admire the bounty of God, than complain of the strain-hardness of providence. And if we did but consider, that there lies upon God no obligation of justice or gratitude to reward any of our duties, it would cure our murmurs, Gen. 32. 10.

(4.) Do not shew the least discontent at the lot and portion providence carves out to you. (1) that you would be well pleased and satisfied with all its appointments! Say as Psal. 16. 6. *The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.* Surely that is best for you, which providence hath appointed, and one day you yourselves will judge it so to be.

(5.) Do not neglect prayers when strains befall you. You see it is providence dispenses all, and you live upon it; therefore apply yourselves to God in the times of need. This is evidently included in the promise, *Ysa. 41.*

17. as well as expressed in the command, *Philip. 4. 6.* remember God, and he will not forget you.

(6) Do not distract your hearts with sinful cares, *Mat. 6. 25, 26.* Consider *the fowls of the air*: (saith Christ) not the fowls at the door, that are daily fed by hand; but those of the air, that know not where to have the next meal; and yet God provides for them. Remember your relation to Christ, and his engagements by promise to you, and by these things work your hearts to satisfaction and content with all the allotments of providence.

The Eighth Performance of Providence.

The next great advantage and mercy the saints receive from the hand of providence, is in *their preservation from the snares and temptations of sin, by its preventing care over them.* That providence wards off many a deadly stroke of temptation, and puts by many a mortal thrust which Satan makes at our souls, is a truth as manifest as the light that shineth: This is included in that promise, *1 Cor. 10. 13.* God will, *with the temptation, make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Providence gives an out-let for the soul's escape, when it is shut up into the dangerous straits of temptation. There are two eminent ways whereby the force and efficacy of temptation is broken in believers. One is by the operation of internal grace, *Gal. 5. 17.* *The spirit lusteth against the flesh*; so that ye cannot do the things that you would; *i. e.* Sanctification gives sin a miscarrying womb after it hath conceived in the soul. The other way, is by the external working of providence; and of this I am here engaged to speak.

The providence of God is the great Obex, and hindrance to a world of sin, which else would break forth like an overflowing flood from our corrupt natures. It prevents abundance of sin, which else wicked men would commit, *Gen. 19. 11.* The Sodomites were greedily pursuing their lusts: God providentially hinders it by smiting them blind. *Jeroboam* intends to smite the prophet; providence interposed and withered his arm, *1 Kings 13. 4.* Thus you see, when wicked men have contrived, and are ready to execute their wickedness, providence claps on its manacles

cles, *Job 5.*

And that the more p...
er care...
they n...
warch...
of sin,
it wou...
file the

1. S...
seasona...
prosect...
the nic...
1 Sam

And...
ed befo...
night i...
seasona...
and, no...
therein...
house,
felt can...
business...
could n...
the ger...
now (a...
was goi...
prevent

2. S...
whereb...
Jehosaph...
ziab, to...
prevent...
as you...
We

Bagsham...
acquain...
strong...
perceiv...

cles, that their hands cannot perform their enterprises, as it is Job 5. 12.

And so much corruption there remains in good men, that they would certainly plunge themselves under much more guilt than they do, if providence did not take greater care of them than they do of themselves: For, tho' they make conscience of keeping themselves, and daily watch their hearts and ways, yet such is the deceitfulness of sin, that, if providence did not lay blocks in their way, it would (more frequently than it doth) entangle and defile them. And this it doth divers ways.

1. Sometimes by stirring up others to interpose with seasonable counsels, which effectually dissuade them from prosecuting an evil design. Thus *Abigail* meets *David* in the nick of time, and dissuades him from his evil purpose 1 Sam 25. 34.

And I find it recorded (as on another account was noted before) of that holy man *Mr. Dod*, that being late at night in his study, he was strongly moved (tho' at an unseasonable hour) to visit a gentleman of his acquaintance; and, not knowing what might be the design of providence therein, he obeyed, and went: When he came to the house, after a few knocks at the door, the gentleman himself came to him, and asked him, Whether he had any business to him? *Mr. Dod* answered, No; but that he could not be quiet till he had seen him. O Sir (replied the gentleman) you are sent of God at this hour, for just now (and with that, takes the halter out of his pocket) I was going to destroy myself. And thus was the mischief prevented.

2. Sometimes by hindering the means and instruments, whereby the evil itself is prevented. Thus, when good *Jehoshaphat* had joined himself with that wicked king *Ahaziah*, to build ships at *Ezion-Geber* to go to *Tarshish*, God prevents the design, by breaking the ships with a storm, as you read, 2 Chron. 20. 35, 36, 37.

We find also in the life of *Mr. Bolton*, written by *Mr. Bagshaw*, That whilst he was in *Oxford*, he had familiar acquaintance with *Mr. Anderton*, a good scholar, but a strong papist; who knowing *Mr. Bolton's* good parts, and perceiving that he was in some outward wants, took this

advan-

advantage, and used many arguments to perswade him to be reconciled to the church of *Rome*, and to go over with him to the *English* Seminary, assuring him he should be furnished with all necessaries, and have gold enough. Mr. *Bolton* being, at that time, poor in mind and purse, accepted the motion, and a day and place was appointed in *Lancashire*, where they should meet, and take shipping, and be gone; but Mr. *Anderton* came not, and so he escaped the snare.

3. Sometimes by laying some strong affliction upon the body, to prevent a worse evil. And this is the meaning of *Hosea* 2. 6. *I will hedge up her way with thorns.* Thus *Basil* was a long time exercised with a violent head-ach, which (as he observed) was used by providence to prevent lust, *Paul* had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him: And this affliction, whatever it was, was ordained to prevent pride in him, *2 Cor.* 12. 7.

Sometimes sin is prevented in the saints, by the better information of their minds at the sacred oracles of God. Thus, when sinful motions began to rise in *David's* mind, from the prosperity of the wicked, and his own afflicted state, and grew to that height, that he began to think all he had done in the way of religion was little better than lost labour; he is set right again, and the temptation dissolved, by going into the sanctuary, where God shewed him how to take new measures of persons and things: To judge them by their ends and issues, not their present appearances, *Psal.* 73. 12, 13, 17.

5. And sometimes the providence of God prevents the sins of his people, by removing them out of the way of temptations by death. In which sense we may understand that text, *Isa.* 57. 1. *The righteous is taken away from the evil to come;* the evil of sin as well as sufferings. When the Lord sees his people low spirited, and not able to grapple with strong trials and temptations which are drawing on, it is, with respect to them, a merciful providence, to be disbanded by death, and set out of harm's way.

Now consider, and admire the providence of God, O ye saints, who hath had more care of your souls than ye had of them. Had not the providence of God thus

thus v
you h
the h
dence
Lord,
was p
selves

1.
hurric
you h
not pr
Jam.
his own
in the

2.
and y
you n
midst o
my sleep
slept in

3.
of tem
of their
never
world,

4.
mercif
that ha
the me
Are yo
mercies
you ov
the ale
long th
ing wh
Wai

allor
13. T
escapes
ness or

thus

thus wrought for you in a way of prevention, it may be you had this day been so many *Major Missabils*. How was the heart of *David* melted under that preventing providence fore-mentioned in *1 Sam. 25. 24*. He blessed the Lord, the instrument and the counsel by which his soul was preserved from sin. Do but seriously bethink yourselves of a few particulars about this case. As,

1. How your corrupt natures have often imperiously hurried you on towards sin, so that all the inherent grace you had could not withstand its force, if providence had not prevented it in some such method as you have heard, *Jam. 1. 14*. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. You find yourselves but feathers in the wind of temptation.

2. How near you have been brought to the brink of sin, and yet saved by a merciful hand of providence. May you not say with him in *Prov. 5. 14*. I was almost in the midst of all evil; or as *Psal. 73. 2*. My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped. O merciful providence, that stept in so opportunely to your relief!

3. How many have been suffered to fall by the hand of temptations, to the reproach of religion, and wounding of their own consciences, to that degree, that they have never recovered former peace again; but liv'd in the world, devoid of comfort to their dying day?

4. How woful your case had been, if the Lord had not mercifully saved you from many thousand temptations, that have assailed you? I tell you, you cannot estimate the mercies you possess by means of such providences. Are your names sweet, and your consciences peaceful, two mercies as dear to you as your two eyes? Why, surely you owe them (if not wholly, yet in great measure) to the aids and assistances providence hath given you all along the way you have passed thro' the dangerous tempting world to this day.

Walk therefore suitably to this obligation of providence also. And see,

1. That you thankfully own it. Don't impute your escapes from sin to accidents, or to your own watchfulness or wisdom.

2. That you are ready to give God the glory of it.

2. See that you tempt not providence on the other hand, by an irregular reliance upon its care over you, without taking all due care of yourselves. *Keep yourselves in the love of God, Jude 21. Keep your hearts with all diligence, Prov. 4. 23.* Tho' providence keep you, yet it is in the way of your duty.

The Ninth Performance of Providence.

Thus you see what care providence hath had over your souls, in preventing the spiritual dangers and miseries that else would have befallen you in the way of temptation: In the next place I will shew you, that it hath been *no less careful for your bodies, and with how great tenderness it hath carried them in its arms thro' innumerable hazards and dangers also.* He is called, *the keeper of Israel, that never slumbereth nor sleepeth, Psal. 121. 4. the preserver of men, Job 7. 20.* To display the glory of this providence before you, let us take into consideration, The perils into which the best of men sometimes fall, and the way and means by which providence preserves them in those dangers.

There are manifold hazards into which we are often cast in this world. The apostle Paul gives us a general account of his dangers, in 2 Cor. 11. 26. And how great a wonder is it, that our life hath not been extinguished in some of those dangers we have been in? For,

1. Have not some of us fallen, and that often, into very dangerous sicknesses and diseases, in which we have approached to the very brink of the grave? and have, or might have, said with Hezekiah, Isa. 38. 10. *I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years.* Have we not often had the sentence of death in ourselves? and our bodies at that time been like a leaky ship in a storm (as one aptly resembles it) that hath taken in water on every side, till it was ready to sink? Yet hath God preserved, careened, and lanced us out again as well as ever. Oh what a wonder is it, that such a crazy body should be preserved for so many years, and survive so many dangers! Surely; it is not more admirable to see a *Venice-glass* pass from hand to hand in continual use for forty or fifty years, and

still

still t
falls
sickne
pon
15. 2

2
ed fe
black
made
often
mark
salva
Be
sed u
six-h
whic
If th
not g

3.
the
stretc
elega
I hav
may
phori
on our
gone o
years
hange
you c
dead
dore
panio
the I
er et
emine
ny fa
know

4.
dents
carrie

still to remain whole, notwithstanding many knocks and falls it hath had. If you enjoy health or recover out of sicknesses, it is, because he puts none of these diseases upon thee, or because he is *the Lord thy Physician*, *Exod. 15. 26.*

2. And how many deadly dangers hath his hand rescued some of you from, in those years of confusion and publick calamity, when the sword was bathed in blood, and made horrid slaughter, when, it may be, your lives were often given you for a prey? This *David* put a special remark upon, *Psal. 140. 7. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation; thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.*

Beza being in *France* in the first civil war, and there tossed up and down for two and twenty months, recorded six-hundred deliverances from dangers in that space, for which he solemnly gave God thanks in his last testament. If the sword destroyed you not, it was because God did not give it a commission so to do.

3. Many of you have seen wonders of salvation upon the deeps, where the hand of God hath been signally stretched forth for your rescue and deliverance. This is elegantly expressed in *Psal. 107. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.* (which I have elsewhere opened at large) concerning which you may say in a proper sense, what the Psalmist doth metaphorically, *Psal. 124. 1. & 4. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, then the waters had overwhelmed us; the stream had gone over our soul. To see men, that have spent so many years upon the seas (where your lives have continually hanged in suspense before you) attain to your years, when you could neither be reckoned among the living nor the dead (as seamen are not) Oh, what cause have you to adore your great preserver! Many thousands of your companions are gone down, and you are yet here to praise the Lord among the living. You have bordered nearer eternity all your days than others, and often been in eminent perils upon the seas; surely such, and so many salvations call aloud upon you for most thankful acknowledgements.*

4. To conclude, how innumerable hazards and accidents (the least of which hath cut off others) hath God carried us all through! I think I may safely say, your

privative and positive mercies of this kind, are more in number than the hairs of your heads. Many thousands of these dangers we never saw, nor were made particularly sensible of; but tho' we saw them not, our God did, and brought us out of danger before he brought us into fear. Some have been evident to us, and those so remarkable, that we cannot think or speak of them to this day, but our souls are freshly affected with those mercies.

It is recorded of our famous *Jewel*; that about the beginning of queen *Mary's* reign, the inquisition taking hold of him in *Oxford*, he fled to *London* by night; but providentially losing the road, he escaped the inquisitors who pursued him: However he fell that night into another eminent hazard of life; for, wandering up and down in the snow, he fainted, and lay starving in the way, panting and labouring for life; at which time Mr. *Latimer's* servant found and saved him.

It were easy to multiply examples in this kind, histories abounding with them; but I think there are few of us, but are furnished out of our own experience abundantly; so that I shall rather chuse to press home the sense of these providences upon you, in order to a suitable return to the God of your mercies for them, than add more instances of this kind. To this purpose, I desire you seriously to weigh the following particulars.

1. Consider what you owe to providence for your protection, by which your life hath been protracted unto this day, with the usefulness and comfort thereof. Look abroad in the world, and you may daily see some in every place, who are objects of pity, bereaved by sad accidents of all the comforts of life, whilst in the mean time providence hath tenderly preserved you, *Keeping all your bones, so that none of them is broken*, *Psal. 34. 20.* Is not the elegant and comely structure of thy body spoiled, thy members distorted, or made so many seats of torment, the usefulness of any part deprived? Why, this is because providence never quitted its hand of thee since thou camest out of the womb, but with a watchful eye and tender hand hath guarded thee in every place, and kept thee in its charge.

2. Consider, how every member, which hath been so tenderly kept, hath nevertheless been an instrument of sin against

agai
unre
unre
but
Lon
how
ofte
pena
al in
been
3
tend
rect
it no
chee
you
cies;
You
your
char
form
your
Rom.
nifol
take
Philip
yea,
it is
serve
-wo

Y
you
there
whic
hide
the pe
Ni
one h
fin, bu

against the Lord; and that, not only in the days of your unregeneracy, when ye yielded your members as instruments for unrighteousness unto sin, as the Apostle speaks in Rom. 6. 13. but even since you gave them up in covenant unto the Lord, as dedicated instruments to his service: And yet how tender hath providence been over them! You have often provoked him to afflict you in every part, and lay penal evil upon every member that hath been instrumental in moral evil; but O how great have his compassions been towards you, and his patience admirable!

3. Consider, what is the aim of providence in all the tender care it hath manifested for you; why doth it protect you so assiduously, and suffer no evil to befall you? Is it not that you should imploy your bodies for God, and cheerfully apply yourselves to that service he hath called you to? Doubtless, this is the end and level of these mercies; for else, to what purpose are they afforded you? Your bodies are a part of Christ's purchase, as well as your souls, 1 Cor. 6. 19. They are committed to the charge and tutelage of angels, Heb. 1. 14. who have performed many services for them. They are dedicated by yourselves to the Lord, and that upon the highest account, Rom. 12. 1. They have already been the subjects of manifold mercies in this world, Psal. 35. 10. and shall partake of singular glory and happiness in the world to come, Philip. 3. 21. And shall they not then be imployed, yea, cheerfully worn out in his service? How reasonable it is they should be so? Why are they so tenderly preserved by God, if they should not be used for God?

-wolto

The tenth performance of Providence.

You have heard many and great things performed for you by divine providence, in the former particulars; but there is an eminent favour it bestows on the saints, which hath not yet been considered, and indeed is too little minded by us, and that is, *The aid and assistance it gives the people of God in the great work of mortification*.

Mortification of our sinful affections and passions, is the one half of our sanctification, Rom. 6. 11. *dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.*

It is the great evidence of our interest in Christ. See *Gal. 5. 24. Rom. 6. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9*

It is our safety in the hour of temptation. The corruptions in the world are through lust, *2 Pet. 1. 4.*

Our instrumental fitness for service depends much upon it, *2 Tim. 2. 21. John 15. 2.* How great a service to our souls therefore must that be, by which this blessed work is carried on upon them?

Now, there are two means or instruments employed in this work. The Spirit, who effects internally, *Rom. 8. 13.* And Providence which assists it externally. The Spirit indeed is the principal agent, upon whose operation the success of this work depends; and all the providences in the world can never effect it without him. But these are secondary and subordinate means, which, by the blessing of the Spirit upon them, have a great stroke of the work. How they are so serviceable to this end and purpose, I shall open in the following account.

1. More generally. The most wise God orders the dispensations of providence in a blessed subordination to the work of the Spirit. There is a sweet harmony betwixt them in their distinct workings. They all meet in that one blessed issue, which God hath, by the counsel of his will, directed them to, *Eph. 1. 11. Rom. 8. 28.* Hence it is, that the Spirit is said to be in, and order the the motions of the wheels of providence, *Ezek. 1. 20.* and so they move together by consent. Now one great part of the Spirit's internal work being to destroy sin in the people of God; see how comformable to his design external providences are steer'd and ordered in the following particulars.

1. There is in all the regenerate a strong propension and inclination to sin, and in that lies a principal part of the power of sin. Of this Paul sadly complains, *Rom. 7. 23. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members:* And every believer daily finds it to his grief. O 'tis hard, 'tis hard, to forbear those things that grieve God! God hath made an hedge about us, and fenced us against sin by his laws; but there is a prone-

ness in nature to break over the hedge, and that against the very reluctations of the spirit of God in us. Now, see in this case, the concurrence and assistance of providence, for the prevention of sin: look, as the spirit internally resists those sinful inclinations; so providence externally lays bars and blocks in our way to hinder and prevent sin: And this is the meaning of those places lately cited, *Hosea* 2. 6. & *2 Cor.* 12. 7. So *Job* 33. 17, 18, 19. There is many a bodily distemper inflicted on this very score, to be a clog to prevent sin; Oh! bear them them patiently upon this consideration. *Basil* was sorely grieved with an inveterate head-ach; he earnestly prays it might be removed; God removed it: But no sooner was he freed of this clog, but he felt the inordinate motions of lust; which made him pray for his head-ach again. So it might be with many of us, if our clogs were off.

A question may be moved here, *Whether it be the genius and property of a gracious spirit, to forbear sin, because of the rod affliction?* They have surely higher motives and nobler principles than these. This is the temper of a carnal and slavish spirit.

Solution. Indeed it is so, when this is the sole or principal restraint from sin: When a man abhors not sin, because of the intrinsick filth, but only because of the troublesome consequents and effects. But, this is vastly different from the case of the saints under sanctified afflictions; for, as they have higher motives and nobler principles, so they have lower and more sensible ones too; and these are, in their kind and place, very useful to them. (2.) Besides, you must know, that afflictions work in another way upon gracious hearts, to restrain them from sin, or warn them against sin, than they do upon others. It is not so much the smart of the rod which they feel, as the tokens of God's displeasure, which affrights and scares them, *Job* 10. 17. *Thou renewest thy witnesses against me,* &c. and this is that which principally affects them. See *Psal* 6. 1. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure:* And *Jer.* 10. 24. *O Lord correct me, but with judgment, not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing:* And surely this is no low and common argument.

(2.) Not-

(2.) Notwithstanding this double fence of God's command, and preventive afflictions, yet sin is too hard for the best of men: Their corruptions carry them through all to sin; and when it is so, not only doth the Spirit work internally, but providence also works externally in order to their reduction. The ways of sin are not only made bitter unto them by the remorse of conscience, but by those afflictive rods upon the outward man, with which God also follows it; and in both respects, I find that place expounded Eccl. 10. 8. *Who so breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.* If, as some expound it, the hedge be the law of God, then the serpent is the remorse of conscience, and the sharp teeth of affliction, which he shall quickly feel, if he be one that belongs to God.

The design and aim of these afflictive providences, is to purge and cleanse them from that pollution into which temptations have plunged them, Isa. 27. 9. *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.* To the same purpose is that place, Psal. 119. 67. *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word.* These afflictions have the same use and end to our souls, that frosty weather hath upon those cloths that are laid a bleaching; they alter the hue, and make it whiter, which seems to be the allusion in those words, Dan. 11. 35. *And some of them of understanding shall fall to try them, and to purge, and to make them white.*

And here it may be queried, Upon what account afflictions are said to purge away the iniquities of the saints? Is it not unwarrantable and very dishonourable to Christ, to attribute that to afflictions which is the peculiar honour of his blood?

Solution. It is confessed, that the blood of Christ is the only lavatory, or fountain opened for sin, that no afflictions, how many, or strong, or continual soever they be, can in themselves purge away the pollution of sin, as we see in wicked men, who are afflicted, and afflicted, and again afflicted; and yet, nevertheless sinful: And the torments of hell, how extreme, universal and continual soever they are, yet shall never fetch out the stain of one sin.

But yet, this hinders not, but that a sanctified affliction, may, in the efficacy and virtue of Christ's blood, produce

such

such
a Chr
beho
of his
souls

(3.)
fortab
in the
up wit
great
of God
them.

This
affecte
vain-gl
David,
kingdo
had sto

The
affectio
the dol
above h
worth

So y
shelter
with it.

But v
ture pu
No, thi
to this
creature
or exce
smite us

Is He
Why, r
empty

Is Da
bility o
clouds
too far i
of his so

such blessed effects upon the soul. Tho' a cross without a Christ never did any man good, yet thousands have been beholden to the cross, as it hath wrought in the virtue of of his death for their good. And this is the case of those souls that this discourse is concerned about.

(3.) We find the best hearts, if God bestow any comfortable enjoyment upon them, too apt to be over-heated in their affections towards it, and to be too much taken up with these outward comforts. This also sheweth the great power and strength of corruption in the people of God, and must by some means or other be mortified in them.

This was the case of *Hezekiah*; his heart was too much affected with his treasures, so that he could not hide a vain-glorious temper, as you find *Isa. 39. 2.* and so good *David, Psal. 30. 7.* he thought his mountain (*i. e.* his kingdom, and the splendor and glory of his present state) had stood so fast that it should never be moved.

The same good man, how did he let out his heart and affections upon his beautiful son *Abalom*? as appears by the doleful lamentation he made at his death, prizing him above his own life, which was of a thousand times more worth than he.

So *Jonah*, when God raised up a gourd for him to shelter him from the sun, how excessively was he taken with it, and was exceedingly glad of it?

But will God suffer things to ly thus? Shall the creature purloin, and draw away our affections from him? No, this is our corruption, and God will purge it. And to this end he sends forth providence, to smite those creatures on which our affections are either inordinately or excessively let out, or else to turn them into rods, and smite us by them.

Is *Hezekiah* too much puffed up with his full exchequer? Why, those very *Babylonians*, to whom he boasted of it, shall empty it, and make a prey of it; *Isa. 39. 6.*

Is *David* hugging himself in a fond conceit of the stability of his earthly splendor? Lo, how soon God beclouds all, *Psal. 30. 7.* Is *Abalom* doted on, and crept too far into his good father's heart? this shall be the son of his sorrow; that shall seek after his fathers life.

Is *Jonah* so transported with his gourd? God will prepare a worm to smite it, *Jonah* 4. 6, 7.

How many husbands, wives and children hath providence smitten upon this very account? It might have spared them longer, if they had been loved more regularly, and moderately. This hath blasted many an estate, and hopeful project; and it is a merciful dispensation for our good.

(4.) The strength of our unmortified corruption shews itself in our pride, and the swelling vanity of our hearts when we have a name and esteem among men; when we are applauded and honoured, when we are admired for any gift or excellency that is in us; this draws forth the pride of the heart, and shews the vanity that is in it. So you read, *Pov. 27. 21. As the firing pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise; i. e. as the furnace will discover what dross is in the metal when it is melted, so will praise and commendations discover what pride is in the heart of him that receives them.* This made a good man say, *He that praises me, wounds me.* And which is more strange, this corruption may be felt in the heart, even when the last breath is ready to expire. It was the saying of one of the *German divines*, when those about him recounted, for his encouragement, the many services he had done for God, *auferte ignem*, (saith he) *ad hoc enim paleas habeo.* Take away the fire; for there is still the chaff of pride in me. To crucify this corruption, providence takes off the bridle of restraint from ungodly men, and sometimes permits them to traduce the names of God's servants, as *Shimei* did *David's*. Yea, they shall fall into dis-esteem among their friends, as *Paul* did among the *Corinthians*; and all this to keep down the swelling of their spirits at the sense of those excellencies that are in them: The design of these providences being nothing else, but to *hide pride from men*. Yea, it deserves a special remark, that when some good men have been engaged in a publick and eminent work, and have therein, it may be, too much sought there own applause, God hath withheld usual assistance at such times from them, and caused them to falter so in their work, that they have come off with shame and pity at such times, how ready and presential soever they

they h
remar
pass o

(5.)
ing up
and p
from s
the w
Job in
shall die
how s
provid
prosper
more
the be
and ov
have g
may ha
earth
to unde
experie
peoples
dences
while
things
hopes,

(6.)
creature
the best
selves
Egypt, a
God su
Ezek. 1
to depo
on our
are, tha
to refre
as by h
Thus a
nearer t
for chis

they have been at other times. It were easy to give divers remarkable examples to confirm this observation. But I pass on.

(5.) The corruption of the heart shews itself, in raising up great expectations to ourselves from the creature, and projecting abundance of felicity and contentment from some promising and hopeful enjoyments we have in the world. This we find to have been the case of holy Job in the days of his prosperity, *Job 28 19. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, I shall multiply my days as the sand.* But how soon were all these expectations dash'd by a gloomy providence, that benighted him in the noon-tide of his prosperity; and all this for his good, to take off his heart more fully from creature expectations. We often find, the best men to over-reckon themselves in worldly things, and over-act their confidences about them. They that have great and well grounded expectations from heaven, may have too great and ungrounded expectations from the earth. But when it is so, it is very usual for providence to undermine their earthly hopes, and convince them by experience how vain they are. Thus *Haggai 1. 9.* the peoples hearts were intently set upon prosperous providences, full harvests and great increase; whilst in the mean while no regard was had to the worship of God, and the things of his house; therefore providence blasts their hopes, and brings them to little.

(6.) Corruption discovers itself in dependence upon creature-comforts, and sensible props. Oh how apt are the best men, to lean upon those things, and stay themselves upon them! Thus did *Israel* stay themselves upon *Egypt*, as a feeble man would lean upon his staff; but God suffered them both to fail them, and wound them, *Ezek. 19. 6, 7, 8.* So for single persons, how apt are they to depend upon their sensible supports! Thus we lean on our relations, and the inward thoughts of our hearts are, that they shall be to us so many springs of comfort to refresh us throughout our lives; but God will shew us by his providence our mistake and error in these things. Thus an husband is smitten, to draw the soul of a wife nearer to God in dependence upon him, *1 Tim. 5. 5.* So for children, we are apt to lay of this child, as *Lamech* of *Noah*

Noah, Gen. 5. 26. *This same shall comfort us*; but the wind passes over these flowers, and they are withered, — to teach us, that our happiness is not bound up in these enjoyments. So for our estates; when the world smiles upon us, and we have got a warm nest, how do we prophesy of rest and peace in those acquisitions, minding, with good Baruch, great things for ourselves; but providence, by a particular or general calamity, overturns our projects, as Jer. 45. 4, 5. and all this to reduce our hearts from the creature to God our only rest.

(7.) Corruption discovers its strength in good men, by their adherence to things below, and lothness to go hence. This often proceeds from the engaging enjoyments and pleasant fruitions we have here below. Providence mortifies this inclination in the saints, (1.) by killing those ensnaring comforts before-hand, making all or most of our pleasant things to die before us. (2.) By imbittering this world to us, by the troubles of it. (3.) By making life undesirable, thro' the pains and infirmities we feel in the body; and so loosing our root, in order to our more easy fall by the fatal stroke.

And thus I have finished the *second general head*. But before I pass from this, I cannot but make a pause, and desire you with me, in an holy amazement, and wonder at the dealings of God with such poor worms as we are. Surely God deals familiarly with men! his condescensions to his own clay are astonishing! All that I shall note at present about it, shall be under these three heads, wherein I find the matter of my present meditations summed up by the Psalmist, Psal. 144. 3 *Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him? or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?* And in this scripture you have represented

1. The immense and transcendent goodness of God who is infinitely above us and all our thoughts, Job 11. 7, 8, 9. *Canst thou by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.* — 2 Chron. 2. 6. *The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him.* — Exod. 15. 11. *He is glorious in holiness,*

ful
him
Isa
buck
he t
not
offer
coun
men
and
Isa
clean
mine
spee
Maj
with
feet
said
of his
2.
yea
Verily
man,
stand
gethe
vanity
extrac
dition
(1.
wrath
as mu
(2.
tempe
than
from
corrup
(3)
they a
26, 27
(sath
rudem

ful in praises, doing wonders. When the scripture speaks of him comparatively, see how it expresses his greatness, Isa. 40. 15, 16, 17. Behold the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted, as the small dust of the balance: Behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Libanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. When the holiest men have addrest themselves to him, see with what humility and deep adoration they have spoken of him and to him! Isa. 6. 5. Wo is me for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts. Nay what affects the very angels of heaven have of that glorious Majesty, you may see, ver. 2, 3. Each one had six wings, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

2. The baseness, vileness and utter unworthiness of man, yea, the holiest and best of men before God, Psal. 39. 5. Verily every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity. Every man, take where you will, and every man, in his best estate, or standing in his freshest glory, is, not only vanity, but altogether vanity. Col Adam col Hebel, every man is every vanity. For do but consider the best of men in their extraction, in their constitution, and in their outward condition.

(1.) In their extraction, Eph. 2. 3. By nature children of wrath even as others. The blood that runs in our veins, is as much tainted as theirs in hell.

(2.) Consider them in their constitutions and natural temper, and it is no better, yea, in many a worse temper than in reprobates: And this grace depose sin in them from the throne; yet oh! what offensive and God-provoking corruptions daily break out of the best hearts!

(3.) Consider them in their outward condition, and they are inferior (for the most part) to others, 1 Cor. 1. 26, 27, 28, &c. and Matth. 11. 25. I thank thee, O Father, (saith Christ) that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

(4.) And

3. And now let us consider and admire, that ever this great and blessed God should be so much concerned, as you have heard he is, in all his providences, about such vile despicable worms as we are! He needs us not; but is perfectly blessed and happy in himself without us. We can add nothing to him, *Job 22. 2. Can a man be profitable to God?* No; the holiest men add nothing to him; yet, see how great account he makes of us. For,

(1.) Doth not his eternal electing love bespeak the dear account he made of us, *Eph 1 4, 5.* How antient, how free, and how astonishing is this act of grace! This is that design which all providences are in pursuit of, and will not rest till they have executed.

(2.) Doth not the gift of his only Son out of his bosom speak this truth, That God makes great account of this vile thing man? Never was man so magnified before. If *David* could say, *Psal 8. 3. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, Lord what is man?* How much more may we say? when we consider thy Son, that lay in thy bosom, his infinite excellency, and unspeakable dearness to thee; Lord, what is man, that such a Christ should be delivered to death for him! for him, and not for fallen angels! *Heb. 2. 16. for him when in a state of enmity with God! Rom. 5 8.*

(3.) Doth not the assiduity of his providential care for us speak his esteem of us? *Isa 27 3. Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous, Job 36 7. no, nor a moment all their days; for did he so, a thousand mischiefs in that moment would rush in upon him, and ruin him.*

(4.) Doth not the tenderness of his providence speak his esteem of us? *Isa. 66 13 As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you. He comforts his (viz. by refreshing providences) as an indulgent mother her tender child. So Isa. 31 5. As birds flying (viz. to their nests, when their young are in danger) so he defendeth his flock-tenderness in the creature can shadow to the tender bowels of the Creator.*

(5.) Doth not the variety of the fruits of his providence speak it? *Lam. 3. 23 Our mercies are new every morning.*

See
forth
publ
(6)
denti
mistr
(7)

to ce
God
been
If the
there
us C
hath
perty a
behalf
Jews by
cause w
my as
be forg
ux no m

H
what in
concerns
place, to
effect
t all tin
les.

This
y the fo
i Th
nanded i
reflection
f mercy
dgment
their apol

See *Psal.* 40. 5. It is a fountain from which do stream forth spiritual and temporal, ordinary and extraordinary, publick and personal mercies; mercies without number!

(6.) Doth not the ministration of angels in the providential kingdom speak it? *Heb.* 1. ult. *Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth, &c.*

(7.) Doth not the providence, which this day calls us to celebrate the memory of, bespeak the great account God hath for his people? O if not so, why had we not been given up as a prey to their teeth! See *Psal.* 124. If the Lord had not been on our side, then wicked men, there compared to fire, water, wild beasts, had devoured us. O blessed be God for that teeming providence that hath already brought forth more than seventy years liberty and peace to the church of God. I shall move in behalf of this providence, that you would do by it, as the Jews by their *Purim*, *Esth.* 9. 27, 28. and the rather, because we seem now to be as near danger by the same enemy as ever since that time: And if such a mercy as this be forgotten, God may say, as *Judges* 10. 13. *I will deliver you no more.*

The Third General Haed.

HAVING proved the concernments of the people of God to be conducted by the care of providence, and given instances in the ten last-named heads, what influence providence hath upon those interests and concerns of theirs among the rest; we come, in the next place, to prove it to be the duty of the people of God to reflect upon these performances of providence for them, at all times, but especially, in times of straits and troubles.

This I will evidence to be your unquestionable duty, by the following particulars.

1 This is our duty, because God hath expressly commanded it, and called his people to make the most serious reflections and animadversions upon his works, whether of mercy or judgment. So, when that dreadfullest of all judgments was executed upon his professing people for their apostasy from God, and God had removed the sym-

bols of his presence from among them, the rest are bid to go *i. e.* by their meditations, (to send at least their thoughts) to *Shiloh*, and see what God did to it *Jer.* 7. 12. So for mercies, God calls us to consider and review them, *Micah.* 6. 5. Remember, O my people, from *Shittim* unto *Gilgal*; that ye may know the faithfulness of the Lord: *q. d.* If you reflect not upon that signal providence, my faithfulness will be covered, and your unfaithfulness discovered. So for God's works of providence about the creatures, we are called to consider them, that we may prop up our faith by those considerations for our own supplies; *Matth.* 6. 28. consider the fowls and lilies.

2. It is plain, that this is our duty, because the neglect of it is every where in scripture condemned as a sin. To be of an heedless, inobservant temper, is very displeasing to God; and so much appears by that scripture, *Isa.* 26. 11. Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see. Nay, it is a sin, which God threatens and denounces a woe against in his word, *Psal.* 28 4, 5. and *Isa.* 5 12, 13. Yea, God not only threatens, but smites men with visible judgment for this sin, *Job* 34. 26, 27.

3. And for this end and purpose it is, that the Holy Ghost hath affixed those notes of attention to the narratives of the works of providence in scripture: All which do invite and call men to a due and deep observation of them. So in that great and celebrated work of providence, in delivering *Israel* out of *Egyptian* bondage, you find a note of attention twice fixed to it, *Exod.* 3. 2, 9. So when that daring enemy *Rabshakeh* (that put *Hezekiah* and all the people in such a consternation) was defeated by providence, there is a note of attention prefix'd to that providence *2 Kings* 19. 7. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, &c. So when God glorifies his wisdom and power, in delivering his people from their enemies, and ensnaring them in the works of their own hands, a double note of attention is affixed to that double work of providence, *Psal.* 9. 16. *Higgaion. Selah.* So at the opening of every seal which contains a remarkable series or branch of providence, not particularly is attention commanded to every one of them *Rev.* 6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Come and see, come and see. A

these a
if no f

4.
no pra
and th
servati
Psal. 10
of men
prison
ly lang
To sear
men in
provide
in the v
ver. 40, 4
pon to p
ult. she
observat
even the
that, of
this duty

5. W
all the w
in upspe
faith live
st the bea
the peop
from pr
new ones
that delive
he bear, k
o Paul, 2
e trust, th
ot confid
latth. 16.
er? Thi
raw their
lojes, Nun
ardons fo
ou hast fo
the

these are very usefess and superfluous additions in scripture, if no such duty lies upon us. See *Psal.* 66. 5.

4. Without due observation of the work of providence, no praise can be rendered to God for any of them. Praise and thanksgiving for mercies depend upon this act of observation of them, and cannot be performed without it. *Psal.* 107. is spent in narratives of God's providential care of men.—To his people in straits, *ver.* 4, 5, 6 —To prisoners in their bonds, *ver.* 10, 11, 12. —To men that lay languishing upon beds of sickness, *ver.* 17, 18, 19 —To seamen upon the stormy ocean, *ver.* 33. &c. —To men in times of famine, *ver.* 33, to *ver.* 40. Yea, his providence is displayed in all those changes that fall out in the world, debasing the high, and exalting the low, *ver.* 40, 41. And at every paragraph men are still called upon to praise God for each of these providences: But *ver.* ult. shews you what a necessary ingredient to that duty observation is; *Who so is wise, and will observe these things; even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.* So that, of necessity, God must be defrauded of his praise, if this duty be neglected.

5. Without this, we lose the usefulness and benefit of all the works of God for us and others, which would be an unspeakable loss indeed to us. This is the food our faith lives upon in days of distress, *Psal.* 74. 14. *Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness, i. e. food to their faith.* From providences past, saints use to argue to fresh and new ones to come. So *David*, 1 *Sam.* 17. 37. *The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.* So *Paul*, 2 *Cor.* 1. 10. *Who hath delivered, and in whom also we trust, that he will yet deliver.* If these be forgotten or not considered, the hands of faith will hang down. See *Matth.* 16. 9. *How is it that you do not remember, neither consider?* This is a topick from which the saints have used to draw their arguments in prayer for new mercies. As *Moses*, *Numb.* 14. 19. when he prays for continued or new pardons for the people, he argues from what was past, *As thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now.* So the church,

Isa. 51. 9, 10. argues for new providences upon the same ground *Moses* pleaded for new pardons.

6. It is a vile slighting of God, not to observe what of himself he manifests in his providences. For in all providences, especially in some, he comes nigh to us: He doth so in his judgments; *Mal.* 3. 5. *I will come nigh to you in judgment.* He comes nigh in mercies also, *Psal.* 145. 18. *The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, &c.* Yea, he is said to visit us by his providence when he corrects, *Hosea* 9. 7. and when he saves and delivers, *Psal.* 106 4. These visitations of God preserve our spirits, *Job* 10. 12. And it is a wonderful condescension in the great God to visit us so often, *Job* 7. 18. *Every morning, and every moment.* But not to take notice of it, is a vile and brutish contempt of God, *Isa.* 1. 3. *Zeph.* 3. 2. You would not do so by a man for whom you have any respect. It is the character of the wicked, not to regard God's favours, *Isa.* 26. 10. or frowns, *Jer.* 5. 3.

In a word, men can never order their addresses to God in prayer, suitable to their conditions without due observation of his providences. Your prayers are to be suitable to your conditions; sometimes we are called to praise, sometimes to humiliation. In the way of his judgments you are to wait for him, *Isa.* 26. 8. to prepare to meet him, *Zeph.* 2. 1, 2. *Amos* 4. 12. Now your business is, to turn away his anger which you see approaching. And sometimes you are called to praise him for mercies received, *Isa.* 12. 1, 2. but then you must first observe them.

Thus you find the matter of *David's* psalms still varied, according to the providences that befall: But an inobservant heedless spirit can never do it. And thus you have the grounds of the duty briefly represented; we pass on to,

The Fourth General Head.

LET US in the next (according to our method proposed) proceed to shew, in what manner we are to reflect upon the performances of providence for us. And certainly

certain
every
of his
for a
mann
be.
spiritu
Ah fir
Christ
of the
and p
follow

Labo
of God
hearts
single a
what w
to the
behold,
therefor
you, be
1. Le
backwar
your liv
member
ders of ol
nigs. H
vidences
sweetnes
Let me
you to r
lives, if
from the
and don
breaking
been in
hearts d

certainly, it is not every slight and transient glance, nor every cold, historical, unaffecting rehearsal, or recognition of his providences towards you, that will pass with God, for a discharge of this great duty: No, no; it is another manner of business than the most of men understand it to be. O that we were but acquainted with this heavenly spiritual exercise! How sweet would it make our lives! Ah sirs! You live enstranged from the pleasure of the Christian life, while you live in the ignorance or neglect of the duty. Now, to lead you up to this heavenly sweet and profitable exercise, I will beg your attention to the following Directions.

The First Direction.

Labour to get as full and thorough recognitions of the providences of God about you from first to last, as you are able. O fill your hearts with the thoughts of him and his ways! If a single act of providence be so ravishing and transporting, what would many such be, if they were presented together to the view of the soul? If one star be so beautiful to behold, what is a constellation? Let your reflections, therefore, upon the acts and workings of providence for you, be full extensively and intensively.

1. Let them be as extensively full as may be. Search backward into all performances of providence throughout your lives. So did Asaph in Psal. 77. 11, 12. *I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old: I will meditate of all thy works, and talk of thy doings.* He laboured to recover and revive the ancient providences of God, mercies many years past, and such a fresh sweetness out of them by new reviews of them. Ah sirs, Let me tell you, there is not such a pleasant history for you to read in all the world as the history of your own lives, if you would but sit down, and record to yourselves, from the beginning hitherto, what God hath been to you and done for you; what signal manifestations and out-breakings of his mercy, faithfulness and love, there have been in all the conditions you have past thro': If your hearts do not melt before you have gone half through that

that history, they are hard hearts indeed. *My father the guide of my youth.*

2. Let them be as intensively full as may be. Let not your thoughts swim like feathers upon the surface of the waters, but sink like lead to the bottom. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein, Psal. 111. 2.* Not that I think it feasible to sound the depth of providence by our short line, *Psal. 77. 19. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known;* but it is our duty to dive as far as we can, and to admire at the depth when we cannot touch the bottom. It is in our viewing providences, as it was with *Elijah's* servant when he looked out for rain, *1 Kings 18. 44.* He went out once and viewed the heavens, and saw nothing; but the prophet bids him go out again and again, and look upon the face of heaven seven times; and when he had done so, what now saith the prophet? O now, saith he, *I see a cloud rising like a man's hand;* and then, keeping his eye upon it intent, he sees the whole face of heaven covered with clouds. So you may look upon some providences once and again, and see little or nothing in them, but look seven times, (*i. e.* meditate often upon it) and you shall see its increasing glory, like that increasing cloud.

There are divers things to be distinctly pondered and valued in one single providence, before you can judge the amount and worth of it: As,

1. The seasonableness of mercy may give it very great value. When it shall be timed so opportunely, and fall out in such a nick, may make it a thousand-fold more considerable to you than the same mercy would have been at another time. Thus when our wants are suffered to grow to an extremity, and all visible hopes fail, then to have relief given in, wonderfully enhances the price of such a mercy *Ila. 41. 17, 18.*

2. The peculiar care and kindness of providence to us, is a consideration which exceedingly heightens the mercy itself, and endears it to us. So when, in general calamities upon the world, we are exempted by the favour of providence, covered under its wings, when God shall call to us in evil days, *Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers*

bers,
be fu
18,
sery,
visibl
we f
Psal.

3.
regar
ed by
slight
yet in
provi
titude
py co
of Jesh
that la
very
of exp
where
which

4.
are o
clearl

Son
very
fide.
which
to do
re to
his ow
have
than
Mark 6
his ow

Son
Rev. 1
the he
his pec
Som
his pec

bers, as it is in *Iſa.* 26. 20. 21. When ſuch promiſes ſhall be fulfilled to us in times of want and famine, as *Pſal.* 33. 18, 19. When others are abandoned and expoſed to miſery, who have every way as much, it may be much more viſible ſecurity againſt it, and yet they delivered up, and we ſaved: Oh, how endearing are ſuch providences! *Pſal.* 91. 7, 8.

3. The introductivenefs of a providence is of ſpecial regard and conſideration, and by no means to be neglected by us. There are leading providences, which, how ſlight and trivial ſoever they may ſeem in themſelves, yet in this reſpect juſtly challenge the firſt rank among providential favours to us; becauſe they iſſue in a multitude of other mercies, and draw a bleſſed train of happy conſequences after them. Such a providence was that, of *Jeſſe's* ſending *David* with provisions to his brethren that lay encamped in the army, *1 Sam.* 17. 17. And thus every Chriſtian may furniſh himſelf out of his own ſtock of experience, if he will but reflect and conſider the place where he is, the relations that he hath, and the way by which he was led into them.

4. The instruments employed by providence for you, are of ſpecial conſideration. And the finger of God is clearly ſeen by us when we purſue that meditation. For,

Sometimes great mercies ſhall be conveyed to us by very improbable means, and more probable ones laid aſide. A ſtranger ſhall be ſtirred up to do that for you, which your near relations by nature had no power or will to do for you. *Jonathan* a mere ſtranger to *David*, clave coſure to him, and was more friendly and uſeful to him, than his own brethren, who deſpised and ſlighted him. Miniſters have found more kindneſs and reſpect from ſtrangers, than their own people that are more obliged to them. *Mark* 6. 4. *A prophet (ſaith Chriſt) is not without honour, ſave in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own houſe.*

Sometimes by the hand of enemies, as well as ſtrangers, *Rev.* 12. 16. *The earth helped the woman.* God hath bowed the hearts of many wicked men, to ſhew great kindneſs to his people, *Acts* 28. 2.

Sometimes God makes uſe of instruments for good to his people, who deſigned nothing but evil and miſchief to

them. Thus *Joseph's* brethren were instrumental to his advancement, in that very thing, wherein they designed his ruin, *Gen. 50. 20.*

5. The design and scope of providence must not escape our thorough consideration, what the aim and level of providence is. And truly this, of all others, is the most warming and melting consideration. You have the general account of the aim of all providences, in *Rom. 8. 28* *And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God.* A thousand friendly hands are at work for them, to promote and bring about their happiness. O! This is enough to sweeten the bitterest providence to us, that we know it shall turn to our salvation, *Philip. 4. 17.* —

6. The respect and relation providence bears to our prayers, is of singular consideration, and a most taking and sweet meditation. Prayer honours providence, and providence honours prayer. Great notice is taken of this in scripture, *Gen. 24. 45. Dan 9. 20. Acts. 12. 12.* You have had the very petitions you asked of him. Providences have born the very signatures of your prayers upon them. O how affectingly sweet are such mercies!

The Second Direction.

In all your observations of providence, have a special respect to that word of God, which is fulfilled and made good to you thereby.

This is a clear truth, that all providences have relation to the written word. Thus *Solomon*, in his prayer, acknowledges that the promises and providences of God went along step by step with his father *David* all his days and that his hand (put there for his providence) had fulfilled whatever his mouth had spoken, *1 Kings 8. 24.* So *Josiah* in like manner acknowledges, that *Not one good thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord had spoken,* *Jos. 23. 14.* He had carefully observed what relation the works of God had to his word. He compared them together, and found an exact harmony. And so may you too, if you will compare them, as he did

This

The Mystery of Providence.

This I shall the more insist upon, because it is by some interpreters supposed to be the very scope of the text: For (as was noted in the explication) they supply and fill the sense with *que promissit*, the things which he hath promised; and so read the text thus, *I will cry unto God most high, to God who performeth the things he hath promised for me.*

Now, tho' I see no reason to limit the sense so narrowly, yet it cannot be denied, but this is an especial part of its intendment. Let us therefore, in all our reviews of providence, consider what word of God, whether it be of threatening, caution, counsel, or promise, is at any time made good to us by his providences. And hereby a two-fold excellent advantage will result to us.

1. This will greatly confirm the truth of the scripture, when we shall see its truth so manifest in the events. Certainly had scripture no other seal or attestation, this alone would be an unanswerable argument of its divinity. When men shall find, in all ages, the works of God wrought so exactly according to this model, that we may say, as we have read or heard, so have we seen. O how great a confirmation is here before our eyes!

2. This will abundantly direct and instruct us in our present duties under all providences. We shall know hereby what we have to do, and how to carry ourselves under all changes of conditions. You learn the voice and errand of the rod only from the word, *Psal. 94. 12.* The word interprets the works of God. Providences in themselves are not a perfect guide: they often puzzle and entangle our thoughts; but bring them to the word, and your duty will be quickly manifested, as *Psal. 73. 16. 17. Until I went into the sanctuary, then I understood their end,* and not only their end, but his own duty, to be quiet in an afflicted condition; and not envy their prosperity.

Well then, bring those providences you have past thro, or are now under, to the word; and you will find yourselves surrounded with a marvellous light, and see the verification of the scriptures in them. I shall therefore here appeal to your consciences, whether you have not found these events of providence falling out agreeably in all respects with the word.

1. The word tells you, that it is your wisdom that interest to keep close to its rules, and the duties it prescribes; that the way of holiness and obedience is the wisest way, *Deut. 4. 5, 6 This is your wisdom.*

Now, let the events of providence to speak, whether this be true or not. Certainly it will appear to be so, whether we respect our present comfort or future happiness, both which we may see daily exposed by departure from duty, and secured by keeping close to it. Let the question be asked of the drunkard, adulterer, or prophane swearer, when by sin they have ruined the body, soul, estate and name, Whether it be their wisdom to walk in those forbidden paths after their own lusts? Whether they had not better consulted their own interest and comfort, in keeping within the bonds and limits of God's commands? And they cannot but confess that *this their way is their folly. What fruit* (saith the Apostle) *had ye in those things, whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death,* Rom. 6. 21. Doth not the providence of God verity upon them, those threatnings that are written, in the experience of all ages? *Prov. 23. 29. v. 21. Chap. 5. 9. Job 31. 12. Prov. 5. 10.* All which woes and miseries they escape that walk in Gods statutes. Look upon the ruined estates and bodies, you may every where see, and behold the truth of the scriptures evidently made good in those sad providences

2. The word tells you, that your departure from the way of integrity and simplicity, to make use of sinful policies, shall never profit you, *1 Sam. 12. 21 Prov. 3.*

5. Let the events of providence speak to this also: Ask your own experience, and you shall have a full confirmation of this truth: Did you ever leave the way of simplicity and integrity, and use sinful shifts, to bring about your own designs, and prosper in that way? Certainly God hath cursed all the ways of sin; and whoever finds them to thrive with them, his people shall not. *Israel* would not rely upon the Lord, but trust in the shadow of *Egypt*; and what advantage had they by this sinful policy? See *Isa. 50. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.* *David* used a great deal of sinful policy to cover his wicked fact, but did it prosper?

See

See
callid
ful p
mifin
Some
ture
Treasu
blow
no go
ences
could

TH
found

13.
rule
canno
20.

T
may
for h
those
ver t

3.
creat
creat
in th
confi
and
curse
whic

Co
wher
lean
you,
hath
we h
from
nity
of o
mode

See 2 Sam. 12. 12. It is an excellent note of *Livy*, *Consilia callida, prima specie lata, tractatu dura, eventu tristia*. Sinful policies in their first appearance, are pleasant and promising, in their management difficult, in their event sad. Some by sinful ways have gotten wealth; but that scripture hath been verified in their experience *Prov. 10. 2. Treasures of wicked men profit nothing*. Either God hath blown upon it by a secret curse, that it hath done them no good, or given them such disquietness in their consciences, that they have been forced to vomit it up; e're they could find peace, *Job 11. 13, 14, 15*.

That which *David* gave in charge to *Solomon* hath been found experimentally true by thousands, *1 Chron. 22. 12, 13*. That the true way to prosperity, is to close to the rule of the word; and that the true reason why men cannot prosper, is their forsaking that rule *2 Chron. 24. 20*.

'Tis true, if God have a purpose to destroy a man, he may for a time suffer him to succeed and prosper in his sin for his greater hardening, *Job 12. 6*. But it is not so with those whom the Lord loves; their sinful shifts shall never thrive with them.

3. The word prohibits your trust and confidence in the creature, even the greatest and most powerful among creatures *Psal. 146. 3*. It tells us, that 'tis better to trust in the Lord than in them, *Psal. 118. 8*. It forbids our confidence in those creatures that are most nearly ally'd and related in the bonds of nature to us, *Micah 7. 5*. It curseth the man that gives that reliance to the creature, which is due to God, *Jer. 17. 5*.

Consult the events of providence in this case, and see whether the word be not verified therein? Did you ever lean upon an *Egyptian* reed, and did it not break under you, and pierce as well as deceive you? O how often hath this been evident in our experience! Whatsoever we have over-loved, idolized, and leaned upon, God hath from time to time broken it, and made us to see the vanity of it; so that we find, the readiest course to be rid of our comforts, is to set our hearts inordinately or immoderately upon them; for our God is a jealous God, and

and will not part with his glory to another. The world is full of examples of persons deprived of their comforts, husband, wives, children, estates, &c. upon this account, and by this means. If *Jonah* be over-joyed in his gourd, a worm is presently prepared to smite it. Hence it is, that so many graves are opened for the burying of our idols out of our sight. If *David* say, *My mountain shall stand strong, I shall not be moved*; the next news he shall hear, is of darkness and trouble, *Psal.* 30. 6, 7. O how true and faithful do we find these sayings of God to be! Who cannot put to his seal, and say, *Thy words are truth*?

4. The word assures us, that sin is the cause and inlet of affliction and sorrow, and that there is an inseparable connection betwixt them, *Numb.* 32. 23. *Be sure your sin will find you out*; i. e. the sad effects and afflictions that follow it shall find you out. So *Psal.* 89. 30, 31, 32. *If his sons forsake my law, I will visit their iniquities with rods.*

Enquire now at the mouth of providence, whether this be indeed so, according to the reports of the word. Ask but your own experiences, and you shall find, that just so providence hath ordered it all along your way. When did you grow into a secure, vain, carnal frame, but you found some rousing startling providence sent to awaken you? When did you wound your consciences with guilt, and God did not wound you for it in some one or other of your beloved enjoyments? Nay, so ordinary is this with God, that from the observations of their own frames and ways, many Christians have fore-boded and presaged troubles at hand.

I do not say, that God never afflicts his people, but for their sin; for he may do it for their trial, *1 Pet.* 4. 12. Nor do I say, that God follows every sin with a rod; for who should stand before him? *Psal.* 130. 3. But this I say, that it is God's usual way, to visit the sins of his people with rods of affliction, and this in mercy to their souls. Upon this account it was, that the rod of God was upon *David*, in a long succession of troubles upon his kingdom and family, after that great prevarication of his *2 Sam.* 12. 10. And, if we would carefully search out the seeds and principles of those miseries under which we or ours do

groan,

groan
side f
4. 18
the
own
God
is the
provi
sider.

5.
the p
nial f
Verily
skren,
for my
now is
and ch
eternal

Th
thou
at thi
made
joy,
natur
dieds
them
they
nothing
and to
ence-
media
ny so
their
God

God i
6.
or fl
them,
trouble

Cor
and I

groan; we should find them to be our own turnings aside from the Lord, according to that *Jer. 2. 19. and Jer. 4. 18.* Have not all these cautions, and threatnings of the word been exactly fulfilled by providence in your own experience? Who can but see the infallible truth of God in all that he hath threatned? And no less evident is the truth of the promises to all that will observe, how providence makes them good every day to us; for consider.

5. How great security God hath given to his people in the promises, that no man shall lose any thing by self-denial for his sake. He hath told us, *Mark 10. 29, 30.* *Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake and the gospels; But he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.*

Tho' that vile apostate *Julian* derided this promise, yet thousands and ten thousands have experienced it, and do at this day stand ready to set their seal to it. God hath made good to his people, not only in spirituals, inward joy, and peace; but even in temporals also: Instead of natural relations, who took care for them before, hundreds of Christians shall stand ready to assist and help them. So that tho' they have left all for Christ, yet they may say with the apostle, *2 Cor. 6. 10.* *As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* O the admirable care and tenderness of providence over those that, for conscience-sake, have left all, and cast themselves upon its immediate care! Are there not at this day to be found many so provided for, even to the envy of their enemies, and their own admiration? Who sees not the faithfulness of God in the promises, that hath but an heart to trust God in them?

6. The word of promise assures us, that whatever wants or straits the saints fall into, their God will never leave them, nor forsake them *Heb. 13. 5.* that he will be with them in trouble, *Psal. 91. 15.*

Consult the various providences of your life in this point, and I doubt not, but you will find the truth of these promises.

mises as often confirmed as you have been in trouble. Ask your own hearts, where, or when was it that your God forsook you, and left you to sink and perish under your burdens? I doubt not, but most of you have been at one time or other plunged in difficulties, difficulties out of which you could see no way of escape by the eye of reason; yea, such as, it may be, staggered your faith in the promise, as *David's* was 1 *Sam.* 27. 1. when he said, *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul. All men are liars,* (even *Samuel* himself) and yet notwithstanding all, we see him emerge out of that sea of trouble, and the promises made good in every title to him. The like, doubtless, you may observe in your own cases. Ask your own souls the question, and they will satisfy it. Did God abandon and cast you off in the day of your straits? Certainly, you must belye your own experience, if you should say so; 'tis true, there have been some plunges and difficulties you have met with, wherein, (1.) You could see no way of escape, but concluded you must perish in them. (2.) Difficulties that have staggered your faith in the promises, and made you doubt, whether the fountain of All-sufficiency would let out itself for your relief. (3.) Yea, such difficulties as have provoked you to murmuring and impatience, and thereby provoked the Lord to forsake you in your straits; but yet you see he did not. He hath either (1.) Strengthened your back to bear; or, (2.) Lightened your burden; or, (3.) Opened an unexpected door of escape, according to that promise, 1 *Cor.* 10. 13. So that the evil which you feared, came not upon you.

7. You read, that the word of God is the only support and relief to a gracious soul in the dark day of affliction, *Psal.* 119. 50, 92.—2 *Sam.* 23. 5. That for this very purpose it is written, *Rom.* 15. 4. No rules of moral prudence, no sensual remedies can perform that for us, which the word can do.

And is not this a sealed truth, attested by a thousand of undeniable experiences? Hence have the saints fetch'd their cordials, when fainting under the rod. One word of God can do more, than ten thousand words of men, to
relieve

relie
direc
the
tha
outw
dern
8. o
8. 2
unde
ease
parec
8.
impr
liber
wher
our
17.ch
Co
spect
is the
sand
parts
savin
hand
and f
Neve
that l
pound
Some
they
them.
9.
man t
tions
Prov.
the th
did D
putati
fell o
those

relieve a distressed soul. If providence have at any time directed you to such promises, as either assure you that the Lord will be with you in trouble, *Psal.* 91. 15. or that encourage you from inward peace, to bear cheerfully outward burdens, *John* 16. 33. or satisfy you of God's tenderness and moderation in his dealings with you, *Isa.* 27. 8. or that you shall reap blessed fruits from them, *Rom.* 8. 28. or that clear up your interest in God, and his love under your afflictions, *2 Sam.* 7. 14. Oh, what sensible ease and relief ensues! how light is your burden, compared with what it was before!

8. The word tells us, that there is no such way to improve our estates, as to lay them out with a cheerful liberality for God; and that our withholding our hands, when God and duty calls to distribute, will not be for our advantage. See *Prov.* 11. 25. *Isa.* 32. 8. *Prov.* 19. 17. chap. 11. 24.

Consult providence now, and you shall find it in all respects according to the report of the word. O how true is the scripture-testimony herein! There are many thousand witnesses now living, that can set their seals to both parts of this proposition. When men save (as they count saving) with one hand, providence scatters by another hand; and what they scatter abroad with a liberal hand, and single eye for God, is surely repaid to them or theirs. Never did any man lose by distributing for God. He that lends to the poor, *fenstratur domino*, (as some have expound that text) puts his money to interest to the Lord. Some have observed, how providence hath doubled all they have laid out for God in the ways unexpected to them.

9. The word assures us, that the best expedient for a man to settle his own interest in the consciences and affections of men, is to direct his ways so as to please the Lord, *Prov.* 16. 7. and doth not providence confirm it? This the three Jews found by experience, *Dan* 3. 28, 29. and so did *Daniel* chap. 6. v. 20, 21, 22. This kept up *John*'s reputation in the conscience of *Herod*, *Mark* 6. 20. So it fell out when *Constantinus* made that exploratory decree; those that were conscientious, were preferred, and those that

that changed their religion, expelled. Never did any man lose at last by his fidelity.

10. The written word tells us, that the best expedient to inward peace and tranquility of mind, under puzzling and distracting troubles, is, to commit ourselves and our case to the Lord; so you read, *Psal.* 37. 5, 6, 7. and *Prov.* 16. 3.

And as you have read in the word, to you have found it in your own experience. Oh! what a burden is off your shoulders, when you have resigned the case to God! Then doth providence issue your affairs comfortably for you. The difficulty is soon over, when the heart is brought to this.

Thus you see, how scriptures are all fulfilled by providence in these few instances I have given of it. Compare them in all other cases, and you shall find the same; for all the lines of providence lead from the scripture, and return thither again, and do most visibly begin and end there.

The Third Direction.

1. In all your reviews and observations of Providence, be sure that you eye God as the author or orderer of them all, *Prov.* 3. 6.

In all the comfortable providences of your lives, eye God as the author or donor of them. Remember he is the father of mercies, that begets every mercy for you, *2 Cor.* 1. 3. *The God of all comfort*, without whose order no mercy or comfort can come to your hands. And think it not enough thus to acknowledge him in a general way; but when you receive mercies, take special notice of the following particulars.

(1.) Eye the care of God for you, *1 Pet.* 5. 7. *He careth for you. Your father knows you have need of these things*, *Mat.* 6. 32. It is but to acquaint him what you want, and your wants are supplied, *Philip.* 4. 6. torture not yourselves about it; you have a father that cares for you.

(2.) Eye the wisdom of God, in the way of dispensing his mercies to you; how suitably they are ordered to your condition, and how seasonably! When one comfort is

cut
Thus
death
(3.)
es of
worth
the le
of the
(4.)
those
ny en
turn a
soul's
(5.)
forts.
your s
more c
(6.)
are co
blood
Merci
which
(7.)
comfor
sand be
11. 37.
(8.)
in your
selves.
these a
2. In
you, ey
he repr
vil, and
evil in t
cularly
(1.)
as a Be
you, an
conclusi
10. Fo
cu

cut off and removed, another is raised up in its room. Thus *Isaac* was comforted in *Rebecca* after his mother's death, *Gen.* 24. 67.

(3.) Eye the free grace of God in them; yea, see riches of grace in every bequest of comfort to so vile and unworthy creatures as you are. See yourselves overtaken by the least of all your mercies, *Gen.* 32. 10. *I am not worthy of the least*, said *Jacob*.

(4.) Eye the condescension of God to your requests for those mercies, *Psal.* 34. 6. This is the sweetest bit in any enjoyment, in which a man can sensibly relish the return and answer of his prayers, and greatly inflames the soul's love to God, *Psal.* 116. 1.

(5.) Eye the design and end of God in all your comforts. Know that it is not sent to satisfy the cravings of your sensual appetite, but to quicken and enable you for a more cheerful discharge of your duty *Deut.* 28. 47.

(6.) Eye the way and method in which your mercies are conveyed to you. They all flow to you thro' the blood of Christ and covenant of grace, *1 Cor.* 3. 22, 23. Mercies derive their sweetness from the channel thro' which they run to us.

(7.) Eye the distinguishing goodness of God, in all the comfortable enjoyments of your lives. How many thousand better than you are denied those comforts? See *Heb.* 11. 37.

(8.) Eye them all as comforts appointed to refresh you in your way to far better and greater mercies than themselves. The best mercies are still reserved till last, and all these are introductive to better.

2. In all the sad and afflictive providences that befall you, eye God as the author and orderer of them also. So he represents himself to us, *Jer.* 18. 11. *Behold, I create evil, and devise a device against you.* And *Amos* 3. 6. *Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* More particularly.

(1.) Set before you the sovereignty of God. Eye him as a Being infinitely superior to you, at whose pleasure you, and all you have is. *Psal.* 115. 3. which is the most conclusive reason and argument of submission, *Psal.* 46. 10. For if we, and all we have, proceeded from his will

will; how equal is it, that we be resigned up to it? It is not many years ago since we were not; and when it pleased him to bring us upon the stage of action, we had no liberty of indenting with him, on what terms we would come into the world, or refuse to be, except we might have our being on such terms as we desired. His sovereignty is gloriously displayed in his eternal decrees and temporal providences. He might have put you into what rank of creatures he pleased; he might have made you the most despicable creatures, worms or toads; or, if men, the most vile, abject and miserable among men: And, when you had run thro' all the miseries of this life, have damned you to eternity, made you miserable for ever, and all this without any wrong to you. And shall not this quiet us under the common afflictions of this life?

(2.) Set the grace and goodness of God before you in all afflictive providences. O see him passing by you in the cloudy and dark day, proclaiming his name, *The LORD, the LORD merciful and gracious*. There are two sorts of mercies that are seldom eclipsed by the darkest affliction that befalls the saints in their temporal concerns, *viz.* sparing mercies in this world, and saving mercy in that to come. It is not so bad now as it might, and we deserved it should be, and it will be better hereafter. This the church observed, and reasoned herself quiet from it, *Lam. 3. 22*. Hath he taken some? he might have taken all. Are we afflicted? it is mercy we are not destroyed. Oh if we consider what temporal mercies are yet spared, and what spiritual mercies are bestowed, and yet continued to us, we shall find cause to admire mercy, rather than complain of severity.

(3.) Eye the wisdom of God in all your afflictions, behold it in the choice of the kind of your affliction, this, and not another; the time, now and not at another season; the degree, in this measure only, and not in a greater; the supports afforded you under it, not left altogether helpless; the issue to which it is overuled, it is made to your good, not ruin. Look upon all these, and then ask thy heart that question God ask'd *Jonah*, *Dost thou well to be angry?* Surely, when you consider all, what need you had of these rods, that your corruptions will require all

this,

this,
the
ever
tish
(4)
the
This
22.
when
his
O
not
hear
judic
ease.
(5)
tion.
is the
be cu
me,
Can
ture-
you
(6)
as the
whom
as the
will
viden
chang
hath
where
know
where
as it i
eth;
posin
provid

this, it may be much more to mortify them ; that, without the perishing of these things, you might have perished for ever ; you will see great reason to be quiet and well satisfied under the hand of God.

(4.) Set the faithfulness of the Lord before you under the saddest providences. So did *David*, *Psal.* 119. 75. This is according to his covenant-faithfulness, *Psal.* 89. 22. Hence it is, that the Lord will not withhold a rod when need requires it, *1 Pet.* 1. 6. Nor will he forsake his people under the rod, when he inflicts it, *2 Cor.* 4. 9.

O what quietness will this breed ! I see my God will not lose my heart, if a rod can prevent it ; he had rather hear me groan here, than howl hereafter : His love is judicious not fond ; he consults my good rather than my ease.

(5.) Eye the all-sufficiency of God in the day of affliction. See enough in him still, whatever be gone. Here is the fountain still as full as ever, tho' this or that pipe be cut off, which was wont to convey somewhat of it to me. O Christians ! can't you make up any loss this way ? Can't you see more in God, than in any or all the creature-comforts you have lost ? With what eyes then do you look upon God ?

(6.) Lastly, Eye the immutability of God ; look on him as the rock of ages, *James* 1. 17. *The father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.* Eye *Jesus Christ*, as *the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.* O how quietly will you then behave yourselves under the changes of providence ! It may be, two or three days have made a sad change in your condition : The death of a dear relation hath turned all things upside-down ; that place is empty where lately they were, as it is, *Job* 7. 10. *His place shall know him no more.* Well, but God is what he was, and where he was : Time shall make no change upon him, as it is in *Isa* 40. 6, 7, 8. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeeth ; but the word of the Lord abideth for ever.* O how composing are those views of God to our spirits under dark providences.

The Fourth Direction.

Lastly, *Work up your hearts to those frames, and exercise those affections, which the several providences of God that are versant about you call for, Eccl. 7. 14.* Suit yourselves to answer the design and end of God in all providences. As there are various affections planted in your souls, so are there several graces planted in those affections, and several providences appointed to draw forth and exercise these graces.

First, When the providences of God are sad and afflictive, either upon the church in general, or your families and persons in particular; then it is seasonable for you, to exercise godly sorrow and humility of spirit; for in that day, and by those providences, God doth call to it, *Isa. 22. 12. Micah 6. 9.* Now sensitive pleasure and natural joy is out of season, *Ezek. 21. 10.* *Should we then make mirth?* If there be either, (1.) A filial spirit in us, we cannot be light and vain when our father is angry; or (2.) If any real sense of the evil of sin, which provokes God's anger, we must be heavy-hearted when God is smiting for it; or (3.) If any sense and compassion for the miseries that sin brings upon the world, it will make us to say with *David, Psal. 119. 158. I beheld the transgressors and was grieved.* 'Tis sad to consider the miseries that they pull down upon themselves in this world and that to come. (4.) If there be any care in us to prevent utter ruin, and stop God in the way of his anger, we know this is the means to do it, *Amos 4. 12.*

2dly, *How sad and dismal soever the face of providence be, yet still maintain spiritual joy and comfort in God under all. Tho' there be no herd in the stall (said Habakkuk, chap. 3. 17, 18.) yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

There are two sorts of comforts, natural and sensitive, divine and spiritual. There is a time when it becomes Christians to exercise both; so *Esth. 9. 22.* And there is a time when the former is to be suspended and laid by, *Psal. 137. 2.* But there is no season, wherein spiritual joy, or comfort, is nothing else but the cheariness of our heart

heart
his pi
er th
most
dent
1.
comf
but th
2.
accou
and l
rejoic
their
to de
farthi
3.
with
9. 15
groom
God i
91. 15
under
God i
4.
pensat
pered
2, 3. 2
it wer
it wou
heart
of fro
5.
ces, w
hands
these r
these
from a
your d
do you
6.
the ch

heart in God, and the sense of our interest in him, and in his promises. And it is sure, that no providence can render this unseasonable to a Christian. Let us suppose the most afflicted and calamitous state a Christian can be incident to, yet,

1. Why should sad providences make him lay by his comforts in God, when as those are but for a moment, but these eternal? 2 Cor. 4. 17.

2. Why should we lay by our joy in God, upon the account of sad providences without, when at the very worst and lowest ebb, the saints have infinitely more cause to rejoice than to be cast down? There's more in one of their mercies to comfort them, than in all their troubles to deject them. All your losses are but as the loss of a farthing to a prince, Rom. 8. 18.

3. Why should they be sad, as long as their God is with them in all their troubles? As Christ said, *Matth. 9. 15. Can the children of the bridegroom be sad, whilst the bridegroom is with them?* So say I, Can the soul be sad whilst God is with it? Oh! methinks, that one promise, *Psal. 91. 15. I will be with him in trouble,* should bear you up under all burdens; let them be cast down, that have not God in trouble to turn to.

4. Why should they be sad, as long as no outward dispensation of providence (be it never so sad) can be interpreted as a mark or sign of God's hatred or anger, *Ecc. 9. 2, 3. There is one event to the righteous and wicked.* Indeed, if it were a signification of the Lord's wrath against a man, it would justify our dejection; but this cannot be so: His heart is full of love, whilst the face of providence is full of frowns.

5. Why should we be cast down under sad providences, whilst we have so great security, that even by the hands of these providences God will do us good, and all these things shall turn to our salvation? Rom. 8. 28. By these God is but killing your lusts, weaning your hearts from a vain world, preventing temptations, and exciting your desires after heaven; this is all the hurt they shall do you; and should that sadden us?

6. Why should we lay by our joy in God, when as the change of our condition is so nigh? It is but a little while

while, and sorrows shall flee away; you shall never suffer more, *God will wipe away all tears*, Rev. 7. 17. Well then, you see there's no reason, upon the account of providence, to give up your joy and comfort in God. But if you will maintain it under all providences, then be careful.

(1.) To clear up your interest in, and title to God. Faith may be separated from comfort, but assurance cannot.

(2.) Mortify your inordinate affections to earthly things: This makes providences that deprive and cross us so heavy. Mortify your opinion and affection, and you sensibly lighten your affliction: It is strong affection that makes strong affliction.

(3.) Dwell much upon the meditation of the Lord's near approach, and then all these things will seem but trifles to you. *Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand.*

3dly, *Exercise heavenly-mindedness, and keep your hearts upon things eternal, under all the providences with which the Lord exercises you in this world*, Gen. 6. 9. Noah walked with God, yet met with as sad providences in his day, as any man that ever lived since his time. But alas! we find most providences rather stops, than steps in our walk with God. If we be under comfortable providences, how sensual, wanton, and worldly do our hearts grow? And if sad providences befall us, how indolent and distracted are we? And this comes to pass partly thro' the narrowness, but mostly thro' the deceitfulness of our spirits. Our hearts are narrow, and know not how to manage two businesses of such different natures, as earthly and heavenly matters are, without detriment to one; *Pecunia nostra duas curas non admittunt*: But certainly such a frame of spirit is attainable, that will enable us to keep on in an even and steady course with God, whatever befall us. Others have attained it, and why not we? Prosperous providences are for the most part a dangerous state to the soul. The moon never suffers an eclipse, but at full; yet *Jehoshaphat's* grace suffered no eclipse from the fulness of his outward condition, who *had riches in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commandments*, 2 Chron. 17. 9, 6. *David's* life was as full of cares, turmoils and in-

icuh
rirus
of p
tract
as g
men
amid
poss
and
his p
you
of it,
there
denci
ous;
could
ward
exerci
the lo
God i
on ear
4th
what
world.
Learn
be come
In t
every
regene
ations
stop the
ishly,
ly cons
1. T
their c
threatn
be adm
forbear
nor, tha
the plai
2 Theff.

incumbrances, as most men's lives we read of; yet how spiritual the temper of his heart was, that excellent book of psalms (which was mostly composed amidst those distractions) will acquaint us. The apostles were cast into as great necessities, and suffered as hard things, as ever men did; yet how raised and heavenly their spirits were amidst all, who sees not? And certainly, if it were not possible to maintain heavenly mindedness in such a state and posture of affairs, God would never exercise any of his people with such providences: He would never give you so much of the world to lose your hearts in the love of it, or so little to distract you with the cares of it. If therefore we were more deeply sanctified, and the tendencies of our hearts heavenward more ardent and vigorous; if we were more mortified to earthly things, and could not but keep our due distance from them; our outward conditions would not, at this rate, draw forth and exercise our inward corruptions, nor would we hazard the loss of so sweet an enjoyment, as our fellowship with God is, for the sake of any concernment our bodies have on earth.

4thly, *Under all providences maintain a contented heart with what the Lord allots you, be it more or less, of the things of this world.* This grace must run parallel with all providences: Learn how to be full, and how to suffer want, and in every state to be content, Philip. 4. 12.

In this duty all men are contented at all times, and in every state; not only the people of God, but even the unregenerate also: I will therefore address some considerations proper to both. And first to the unregenerate, to stop their mouths from repining, and charging God foolishly, when providence crosses them; Let them seriously consider these four things,

1. That hell and eternal damnation are the portion of their cup, according to the tenor of law, and gospel-threatenings: Whatsoever therefore is short of this, is to be admired as the fruit of God's stupenduous patience and forbearance towards them. Ah! poor souls! Know you not, that you are men and women condemned to wrath by the plain sentence of the law? *Mark 16. 16. John 3. 36. 2 Thess. 1. 6, 7.* And is so sure there are other matters

to exercise our thoughts, desires, fears and cares about, than these. Alas! If you cannot bear a frown of providence, a light cross in these things, how will you bear the everlasting burnings! A man that is to lose his head to-morrow, is not very solicitous what bed he lies on, or how his table is furnish'd the night before.

2. Consider, tho' you be condemned persons, and have no promise to entitle you to any mercy; yet there are very many mercies in your possession at this day. Be your condition as afflictive as it will, is life nothing? especially considering whither you must sink, when that thread is cut. Are the necessary supports of life nothing? Doth not providence minister to you these things, tho' you daily disoblige it, and provoke God to send you to your own place? But, above all, is the gospel and precious means of salvation nothing, by which you yet are in a capacity of escaping the damnation of hell? O! what would the damned say, if they were but put into your condition once more! What, and yet fret against God, because every thing else suits not your desires?

3. Consider, that if ever you be rescued out of that miserable condition you are in, such cross providences, as these you complain of, are the most probable means to do it. Alas! prosperity and success is not the way to save, but to destroy you, *Prov.* 1. 32. You must be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction, if ever your ear be opened to instruction, *Job* 36. 8, 9, 10. Wo to you, if you go on smoothly in the way in which you are, and meet with no crosses.

4. Consider all your troubles under which you complain, are pulled down upon your heads by your own sins. You turn God's mercies into sin, and then fret against God, because he turns your sins into sorrow: Your ways and doings procure these things to you. Lay your hand therefore upon your mouth and say, *Why doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?* *Lam.*

3. 39.

But I must turn to the Lord's people, who have least pretences of all men to be dissatisfied with any of God's providences, and yet are but too frequently found in that temper

temper
derati

I,
which
your l
alone
this w
was o
not for
cry ou
who hat
Oh wh
Christ,
lor of

2. C
ed with
What i
to mort
ternal r
Every f
rather w
have no
ruptions
are upo
mortify a
rods that
and earth
are but n
our.

3. Con
condition
well with
comfort t
that ever
with them
it doth no
a few mile
the house,
almost bre
hem: Th
when you bel

temper. And to whom I shall offer the following considerations.

1. Consider your spiritual mercies and privileges, with which the Lord Jesus hath invested you; and repine at your lot of providence, if you can. One of these mercies alone hath enough in it to sweeten all your troubles in this world. When the apostle considered them, his heart was overwhelmed with astonishment, so that he could not forbear, in the midst of all his outward troubles, to cry out, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings, &c.* Eph. 1. 3. Oh who, that sees such inheritance settled upon him in Christ, can ever open his mouth more to repine at his lot of providence!

2. Consider your sins, and that will make you contented with your lot. Yea, consider two things in sin; (1.) What it deserves from God; and (2.) What it requires to mortify and purge it in you. It deserves from God eternal ruin; the merit of hell is in the least vain thought: Every sin forfeits all the mercies you have; and if so, rather wonder your mercies are so many, than that you have no more. Besides, you cannot doubt, but your corruptions require all the crosses, wants and troubles that are upon you, and it may be, a great deal more, to mortify and subdue them. Don't you find, after all the rods that have been upon you, a proud heart still, a vain and earthly heart still? Oh! how many bitter potions are but necessary to purge out this tough malignant humour.

3. Consider how near you are to the change of your condition: Have but a little patience, and all will be as well with you as your hearts can desire. It is no small comfort to the saints, that this world is the worst place that ever they shall be in; things will better every day with them. If the traveller have spent all his money, yet it doth not much trouble him, if he know himself within a few miles of his own home. If there be no candles in the house, we do not much matter it, if we are sure 'tis almost break of day, for then there will be no use for them: This is your case; *your salvation was nearer than when you believed*, Rom. 13. 11.

I have done with the directive part of this discourse; but before I pass to the fifth head, I judge it necessary to leave a few cautions, to prevent the abuse of providence, and your miscarriages in your behaviour towards it. And,

First Caution.] If providence delay the performance of any mercy to you, that you have long waited and prayed for; yet see, that you despond not, nor grow weary of waiting upon God for that reason. It pleases the Lord oftentimes to try and exercise his people this way, and make them cry, *How long, Lord, how long*, Psal. 13. 1, 2.

These delays, both upon spiritual and temporal accounts, are frequent; and when they befall us, we are too apt to interpret them as denials, and fall into a sinful despondency of mind, tho' there be no cause at all for it; *Psal. 31. 12. Lam. 3. 8, 44.* It is not always that the returns of prayer are dispatch'd to us in the same hour they are ask'd of God, yet sometimes it falls out so, *Isa. 65. 24. Dan. 9. 23.* But tho' the Lord means to perform to us the mercies we desire, yet he will ordinarily exercise our patience to wait for them; and that for these reasons.

1. Because our time is not the proper season for us to receive our mercies in. Now the season of mercy is a very great circumstance that adds much to the value of it: God judges not as we do; we are all in haste, and will have it now, *Numb. 12. 13. But he is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him.* *Isa. 30. 18.*

2. Afflictive providences have not accomplished that design upon our hearts they were sent for, when we are so earnest and impatient for a change of them; and till then the rod must not be taken off, *Isa. 10. 12.*

3. The more prayers and searchings of heart come between our wants and supplies, our afflictions and reliefs, the sweeter are our reliefs and supplies, thereby made to us; *Isa. 25. 9. This is our God, and we have waited for him, and he will save us: This is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.* This recompenses the delay, and pays us for all the expences of our patience.

But tho' there be such weighty reasons for the stop and delay of refreshing comfortable providences, yet we cannot bear it; our hands hang down and we faint, *Psal.* 69. 3. *I am weary of my crying, my throat is dry, mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.* For alas! we judge by sense and appearance, and consider not, that God's heart may be towards us, whilst the hand of his providence seems to be against us. If things continue at one rate with us, we think our prayers are lost, and our hopes perished from the Lord: Much more when things grow worse and worse, and our darkness and trouble encreases, as usually it doth just before the break of day, and change of our condition; then we conclude, God is angry with our prayers. See *Gideon's* reply, *Judges* 6. 13. This even staggered a *Moses's* faith, *Exod.* 5. 22, 23. O! what groundless jealousies and suspicions of God are found at such times upon the hearts of his own children! *Job* 9 16. 17. *Psal.* 77. 7, 8, 8.

But this is our great evil, and to prevent it in future trials, I will offer a few proper considerations in the case.

1. The delay of your mercies is really for your advantage. You read, *Isa* 30. 18. *The Lord waits that he may be gracious.* What is that? Why, it is nothing else but the time of his preparation of mercies for you, and your hearts for mercy, that so you may have it with the greatest advantage of comfort. The foolish child would pluck the apple while it is green, but when it is ripe, it drops of its own accord, and it is more pleasant and wholesome.

2. It is a greater mercy, to have an heart willing to refer all to God, and be at his dispose, than to enjoy presently the mercy we are most eager and impatient for: In that God pleases you, in this you please God. A mercy may be given you as the fruit of common providence, but such a temper of heart is the fruit of special grace: So much as the glorifying of God is better than the content and pleasure of the creature, so much is such a frame better than such a fruition.

3. Expected mercies are never nearer, than when the hearts and hopes of God's people are lowest. Thus in
F 2
their

their deliverance out of *Egypt* and *Babylon*, *Ezek.* 37. 11. So we have found it in our own personal concerns. *At evening time it shall be light*, *Zach.* 14. 7. When we look for increasing darkness, light arises.

4. Our unfitness for mercy is the reason why they are delayed so long. We put the blocks into the way of mercy, and then repine, that they make no more haste to us; *Isa.* 59. 1, 2. *The Lord's hand is not shortened,—but our iniquities have separated between him and us.*

5. Consider, the mercies you wait for, are the fruits of pure grace; you deserve them not, nor can claim them upon any title or desert, and therefore have reason to wait for them in a patient and thankful frame.

6. Consider, how many millions of men, as good as you by nature, are cut off from all hope and expectation of mercy forever, and there remains to them nothing but a fearful expectation of wrath. This might have been your case; and therefore be not of an impatient spirit under the expectations of mercy.

Second Caution.] Pry not too curiously into the secrets of providence, nor suffer your shallow reason arrogantly to judge and censure its designs.

There be hard texts in the works, as well as in the word of God: It becomes us modestly and humbly to reverence, but not to dogmatize too boldly and positively upon them; a man may easily get a strain by over-reaching. *When I thought to know this* (saith *Asaph*) *it was too wonderful for me.* I thought to know this; there was the arrogant attempt of reason, there he pryed into the Arcana of providence; but it was too wonderful for me, it was *labor inutilis*, as *Calvin*, expounds it. He pryed so far into that puzzling mystery of the afflictions of the righteous, and prosperity of the wicked, till it begat envy towards them, and despondency in himself, *Psal.* 73. ver. 3, 13. and this was all he got by summoning providence to the bar of reason. Holy *Job* was guilty of this evil, and ingenuously ashamed of it, *Job* 42. 3.

I know there is nothing in the word, or in the works of God, that is repugnant to sound reason; but there are some things in both, which are opposite to carnal reason,

as well as above right reason; and therefore our reason never shews itself more unreasonable, than in summoning those to its bar, which transcend its sphere and capacity. Manifold are the mischiefs which ensue upon this practice.

1. By this we are drawn into an unworthy suspicion and distrust of the faithfulness of God in the promises. *Sarah* laugh'd at the tidings of the Son of promise, because reason contradicted, and told her it was naturally impossible, *Gen.* 18. 13, 14.

2. Hence comes despondency of mind, and faintness of heart under afflictive providences; reason can discern no good fruits in them, nor deliverance from them, and so our hands hang down in a sinful discouragement, saying, all these things are against us, *1 Sam.* 27. 1.

3. Hence flow temptations to deliver ourselves by indirect and sinful mediums, *Isa.* 30. 15, 16. When our own reason fills us with a distrust of providence, it naturally prompts us to sinful shifts, and there leaves us entangled in the snares of our own making.

Beware therefore you lean not too much to your own reasons and understandings: Nothing is more plausible nothing more dangerous. In other matters it is appointed the arbiter and judge, we make it so here, and therefore we are so diffident and distrustful notwithstanding the fullest security of the promises, whilst our reason stands by unsatisfied.

The Fifth General Head

HAVING given directions for the due management of this great and important duty; what remains, but that we now set our hearts to it, and make it the constant work of every day throughout our lives? O what peace, what pleasure, what stability, what holycourage and confidence, would result from such an observation of providence as hath been directed to! But alas! we may say, with reference to the voices of divine providence, as it is, *Job* 33. 14. *God speaketh once, yet man perceiveth it not.* Many a time providence

hath spoken instruction in duty, conviction for iniquity, encouragement under despondency; but we regard it not. How greatly are we wanting to our duty and comfort by this neglect! It will be but needful therefore, to spread before you the loveliness and excellency of walking with God in a due and daily observation of his providences, that our souls may be fully engaged to it.

First Motive.

And first, Let me offer this, as a moving argument to all gracious souls; *That by this means you may maintain sweet and sensible communion with God from day to day.* And what is there desirable in this world, in comparison thereof! *Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy works; I will triumph in the works of thy hands, Psal. 92. 4.* Your hearts may be as sweetly and sensibly refresh'd by the works of God's hands, as by the words of his mouth, The whole of *Psal. 104.* is spent in the consideration of the works of providence, which so filled the Psalmist's heart, that by way of ejaculation he expresses the effect of it, ver. 34. *My meditation of him shall be sweet.*

Communion with God, properly and strictly taken, consists in two things, viz. God's manifestation of himself to the soul, and the soul's answerable returns to God. This is that *koinonia*, or fellowship we have here with God: Now God manifests himself to his people by providences as well as ordinances; neither is there any grace in a sanctified soul hid from the gracious influences of his providential manifestations. Sometimes the Lord manifests his displeasure and anger against the sins of his people in correcting and rebuking providences; his rods have a chiding voice, *Micah 6. 9. Hear the rod, and who hath appointed it.* This discovery of God's anger kindly melts and thaws a gracious soul, and produces a double sweet effect upon it; namely, repentance for sins past, and due caution against future sins. 1. It thaws and melts the heart for sins committed. Thus *David's* heart was melted for his sin, when the hand of God was heavy upon him in affliction, *Psal. 32. 4, 5.* Thus the captive church, upon whom fell the saddest and most dismal providence

that ever befel any of God's people in any age of the world; see how their hearts are broken for sin under this severe rebuke, *Lam.* 2. 17, 18, 19. And then, 2. For caution against sin for the time to come; it is plain, that the rebukes of providence leave that effect also upon gracious hearts, *Exra* 9. 13, 14. *Psal.* 85. 8.

Sometimes he cheers and comforts the hearts of his people with smiling and reviving providences, both publick and personal: There are times of lifting up as well as casting down, by the hand of providence. The scene changes, the aspects of providence are very cheerful and encouraging; their winter seems to be over; they put off their garments of mourning; and then, ah! what sweet returns are made to heaven by gracious souls! Doth God lift them up by prosperity? They also lift up their God by praises. See *Psal.* 18. *Title*, and *ver.* 1. 2, 3. So *Moses* and the people with him, *Exod.* 15. when God had delivered them from *Pharaoh*; how do they exalt him in a song of thanksgiving, which for the elegance and spirituality of it, is made an emblem of the dōxologies given to God in glory by the saints! *Rev.* 15. 3.

Upon the whole, whatever effects our communion with God in any of his ordinances doth use to produce upon our hearts, the same we may observe to follow our conversing with him in his providences. For,

1. It is usually found, in the experience of all the saints, that in what ordinance or duty soever they have any sensible communion with God, it naturally produces in their spirits a deep abasement and humiliation from the sense of divine condescensions to such vile poor worms as we are. Thus, *Abraham*, *Gen.* 18. 27. *I am but dust and ashes.* The same effect follows our converse with God in his providence. Thus, when God had in the way of his providence prospered *Jacob*, how doth he lay himself at the feet of God, as a man overwhelmed with the sense of mercy! See *Gen.* 32. 5, 10. *And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.* Thus also it was with *David*, *2 Sam.* 7. 18. *Who am I, and what is my fathers house,*

What thou hast brought me hitherto! And I doubt not, but some of you have found the like frame of heart upon you, that these holy men here expressed. Can you not remember when God lifted you up by providence, how you cast down yourselves before him, and have been viler in your own eyes than ever! Why, thus do all gracious hearts; What am I, that the Lord should do thus and thus for me! O that ever so great and holy a God should thus be concerned for such vile and sinful a worm!

2. Doth communion with God in ordinances, melt the heart into love to God? *Cant.* 2. 3, 4, 5. Why, so doth the observation of his providences also. Never did any man converse with God's works of providence aright, but found his heart at sometimes melted into love to the God of his mercies, *Psal.* 18. 1. compared with the title. When God had delivered him from the hand of *Saul*, and all his enemies, he said, *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.* Every man loves the mercies of God, but a saint loves the God of his mercies. The mercies of God, as they are fuel of a wicked man's lusts, so they are the fuel to maintain a good man's love to God; not that their love to God is grounded upon these external benefits; not thine, but thee, O Lord, is the motto of a gracious soul; but yet these things serve to blow up the flame of love to God in their hearts, and they find it so.

3. Doth communion with God set the keenest edge upon the soul against sin? You see it doth; and have a pregnant instance of it in *Moses*, when he had been with God in the mount for forty days, and had there enjoyed communion with him; when he came down and saw the calf the people had made, see what an holy paroxysm of zeal and anger it cast his soul into, *Exod.* 32. 19. 20. Why, the same effect you may discern to follow the saints converse with God in his providences: What was that which pierced the heart of *David* with such a deep sense of the evil of his sin, *Psal.* 51. throughout? Why, if you look into the title, you shall find it was the effect of what *Nathan* had laid before him; and if you consult *2 Sam.* 12. 7, 8, 9, 10. you shall find, it was the goodness of God manifested to him in the several endearing providences of his life, which in this he had so evilly requited the Lord

for,
I do
like
ther
4.
for
whee
cour
lestat
he pr
Here
lows
2 Chr
soul
chuse
these
An
have
you v
migh
never
his n
will
stowe
ver.

A g
made o
2. The
have p
sweet
and di
soul,
I
in the
jar and
ways
up, th
10. M

for, that broke his heart to pieces in the sense of it: And I doubt not, but some of us have sometimes found the like effects, by comparing God's ways and our own together.

4. Doth communion with the Lord enlarge the heart for obedience and service! Surely it is as oil to the wheels, that makes them run on freely and nimbly their course. Thus when *Isaiah* had obtained a special manifestation of God, and the Lord ask'd, *Whom shall I send?* he presents a ready soul for the employment, *Isa. 6. 8. Here am I, Lord, send me.* Why, the very same effect follows sanctified providences, as you may see in *Jehoshaphat*, *2 Chron. 17. 5, 6.* and in *David*, *Psal. 116. 12.* O when a soul considers what God hath done for him, he cannot chuse but say, What shall I return? how shall I answer these engagements?

And thus you see, what sweet communion a soul may have with God in the way of his providences. O that you would thus walk with him! How much of heaven might be found on earth this way! And certainly, it will never repent the Lord he hath done you good, when his mercies produce such effects upon your hearts; he will say of every favour thus improved, It was well bestowed, and will rejoice over you to do you good for ever.

Second Motive.

A great part of the pleasure and delight of the Christian life is made out of the observations of providence. It is said, *Psal. 111. 2. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein: (i. e.)* the study of providence is so sweet and pleasant, that it invites and allures the soul to search and dive into it: How pleasant is it, to a well tempered soul, to behold and observe.

1. The sweet harmony and consent of divine attributes in the issues of providence! They may seem sometimes to jar and clash, to part with each other, and go contrary ways; but they only seem so to do; for in the winding up, they always meet and embrace each other, *Psal. 85. 10. Mercy and truth have met together; right cousness and peace*

kissed each other. It is spoken with an immediate reference to that signal providence of *Israel's* deliverance out of the *Babylonish* captivity, and the sweet effects thereof; wherein the truth and righteousness of God in the promises, did as it were kiss and embrace the mercy and peace that was contained in the performance of them, after they had seemed for seventy years to be at a great distance from each other. For it is an allusion to the usual demonstrations of joy and gladness, that two dear friends are wont to give and receive, after a long absence and separation from each other; they no sooner meet but they smile, embrace and kiss each other: Even thus it is here. The word *Niphkosbu* may be (and by some is) render'd, *have met us*; and that also is true, for when ever these blessed promises and performances meet and kiss each other, they are also joyfully embraced and kissed by believing souls. There is, I doubt not, a mediate reference of this scripture to the *Messiah* also, and our redemption by him: In him it is that these divine attributes, which before seemed to clash and contradict one another in the business of our salvation, have a sweet agreement and accomplishment. Truth and righteousness do in him meet with mercy and peace in a blessed agreement. What a lovely sight is this, and how pleasant to behold! O if with *Habakkuk*, chap. 2. ver. 3. we would but stand upon our watch-tower to take due observations of providence; what rare prospects might we have! *Luther* understands it of the word of God, q. d. I will look into the word, and observe there how God accomplisheth all things, and brings them to pass, and how his works are the fulfilling of his word. Others (as *Calvin*) understand it of a man's own retiring thoughts and meditations, wherein a man carefully observes what purposes and designs God hath upon the world in general, or upon himself in particular, and how the truth and righteousness of God in the word work themselves thro' all difficulties and impediments, and meet in the mercy, peace and happiness of the saints at last. Every believer (take it in which sense you will) hath his watch-tower as well as *Habakkuk*; and give me leave to say, it is an angelical employment to stand upon it, and behold the consent of God's attributes,

the

the
the
ange
and
Chu
2.
God
resur
dead
obse
and
ourse
suspe
to us
but a
for is
no p
lang
pond
Lord
praye
them
restor
wid's
yet l
them
up al
o see
vanta
of pr
praye
shalt j
Jacob,
loved
provi
gain,
29. 3
3.
blessi
out o
or m

the accomplishment of his ends, and our own happiness in the works of providence. For this is the very joy of the angels and saints in heaven, to see God's ends wrought out, and his attributes glorified in the mercy and peace of the Church, *Rev. 14. 1, 2, 3, & 8.*

2. And as it is a pleasant sight to see the harmony of God's attributes so it is exceeding pleasant to behold the resurrection of our own prayers and hopes as from the dead: Why, this you may often see, if you will duly observe the works of providence towards you. We hope and pray for such and such mercies to the church, or to ourselves; but God delays the accomplishment of our hopes, suspends the answer of our prayers; and seems to speak to us, as *Hab. 2. 3. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry:* But we have no patience to wait the time of the promise, our hopes languish and die in the interim; and we say with the desponding church, *Lam. 3. 18. Our hope is perished from the Lord;* but oh, how sweet and comfortable is it, to see these prayers fulfilled, after we have given up all expectation of them! May we not say of them, as the scripture speaks of the restoration of the Jews, it is even life from the dead. Thus was *David's* case, *Psal. 31. 2. he gave up his hopes and prayers for lost, yet lived to see the comfortable and unexpected returns of them.* And thus was the case of *Job*, chap. 6. 11. he had given up all expectation of better days; and yet this man lived to see a resurrection of all his lost comforts with an advantage. Think how that change and unexpected turn of providence affected his soul: It is with our hopes and prayers as with our alms, *Cast thy bread on the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days, Eccl. 11. 1.* Or as it was with *Jacob*, who had given over all hopes of ever seeing his beloved *Joseph* again, but when a strange and unexpected providence had restored that hopeless mercy to him again, oh how ravishing and transporting was it! *Gen. 46, 29. 30.*

3. What a transporting pleasure is it, to behold great blessings and advantages to us, wrought by providence out of those very things that seemed to threaten our ruin or misery! and yet by due observing the ways of providence,

vidence, you may, to your singular comfort, find it so. Little did *Joseph* think, his transportation into *Egypt* had been in order to his advancement there; yet he lived with joy to see it, and with a thankful heart to acknowledge it, *Gen.* 45. 5. Wait and observe, and you shall assuredly find that promise, *Rom.* 8. 28. working out its way through all providences. How many times have you been made to say, as *David*, *Psal.* 119. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.* O what a difference have we seen betwixt our afflictions at our first meeting with them, and our parting from them! We have entertained them with sighs and tears, but parted from them with joy, blessing God for them as the happy instruments of our good. Thus our fears and sorrows are turned into praises and songs of thanksgiving.

4. What unspeakable comfort is it, for a poor soul, that sees nothing but sin and vileness in i self, at the same time to see what an high esteem and value the Great God hath for him! This may be discerned by a due attendance to providence; for there a man sees goodness and mercy following him thro' all his days, as it is *Psal.* 23. 6. Other men prosecute good, and it flies from them, they can never overtake it; but goodness and mercy follow the people of God, and they cannot avoid or escape it; it gives them chase day by day, and finds them out, even when they sometimes put themselves by sin out of the way of it. In all the providences that befall them, goodness and mercy pursues them. O with what melting heart do they sometimes reflect upon these things! "And will not the goodness of God be discouraged from following me, notwithstanding all my vile affronts and abuses of it in former mercies? Lord, what am I, that mercy should thus pursue me, when vengeance and wrath pursue others as good by nature as I am?" It certainly argues the great esteem God hath of a man, when he thus follows him with sanctified providences (whether they be comforts or crosses) for his good. And so much is plain, from *Job* 7. 18. *Lord what is man, that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?* Certainly, God's people are his treasure, and by this it appears that they are so, that he withdraws not his eye from

from
spect
dence
it to
excee

5.
can
by ev
ven?

ance
Ho
any
that
fir the

St.

added
impos
that i

they

prayer

When

means

becom

we no

sense

have

How

to ki

from

those

some

In t

val me

power

The

this is

judgm

ones p

from them, *Job* 36. 7. I lay not, that God's favour and respect to a man may be concluded singly from his providences; but sanctified providences may very much clear it to us; and when it doth so, it cannot but be matter of exceeding great joy.

5. To conclude, What is there in all this world, that can give a soul such joy and comfort, as to find himself by every thing set on, and furthered, in his way to heaven? And yet this may be discerned by an heedful attendance to the effects and issues of providence.

How cross soever the winds and tides of providence at any time seem to us; yet nothing is more certain, than that they all conspire to hasten sanctified souls to God, and fit them for glory.

St. Paul knew, that both his bonds and the afflictions added to them should turn to, or (as the word *apobesetas* imports) finally issue in his salvation, *Phil.* 1. 19. Not that in themselves they serve to any such purpose; but as they are over-ruled and determined to such an end, thro' prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. When prayer the external, and the Spirit the internal means are joined with them, then afflictions themselves become excellent means to promote salvation. And have we not with joy observed, how those very things, that sense and reason tell us they are opposite to our happiness, have been the most blessed instruments to promote it? How hath God blessed crosses to mortify corruption, wants to kill our wantonness, disappointments to wean us from the world! O we little think, how comfortable those things will be in the review, which are so burdensome to present sense!

Third Motive.

In the next place, I beseech you consider, *What an effectual means the due observation of providence will be to overpower and suppress the natural atheism that is in your hearts.*

There is a natural seed of atheism in the best hearts, and this is very much nourished, by passing a rash and false judgment upon the works of providence. When we see wicked ones prosper in the world, and godly men crushed and de-

stroy'd

stroy'd in the way of righteousness and integrity; it may tempt us to think, there is no advantage by religion, and all our self-denial and holiness to be little better than lost labour. Thus stood the case with good *Asaph*, *Psal.* 73. 12, 13. *Behold, these are the ungodly that prosper in the world, they increase in riches:* And what doth the flesh infer from thence? Why, no less than the unprofitableness of the ways of holiness; *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain; and washed my hands in innocency.* This irreligious inference carnal reason was ready to draw from the dispensations of outward prosperity to wicked men: But, now if we would heedfully observe, either the signal retributions of providence to many of them in this world, or to all of them in the world to come; O what a full confirmation is this to our faith! *Psal.* 9. 16. *The Lord is known by the judgments that he executeth.* The 58th psalm contains the characters of the most prodigious sinners, whose wickedness is aggravated, by the deliberation with which it is committed, *ver.* 2.—By their habit and custom in it, *v.* 3.—By their incorrigibleness and persistance in it, *v.* 4, 5.—And the providence of God is there invited to destroy their power *v.* 6.—and that either by a gradual and insensible consumption of them, *v.* 6.—or by a sudden unexpected stroke, *v.* 9.

And what shall the effects of such providences be to the righteous? Why, it shall be matter of joy, *v.* 10.—and great confirmation to their faith in God, *v.* 11. *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

And on the contrary, how convincingly clear are those providences, that demonstrate the being, wisdom, power, love and faithfulness of God, in the supporting, preserving and delivering of the righteous, in all their dangers, fears and difficulties? In these things the Lord shews himself to his people, *Psal.* 94. 1. *Yea, he shews himself to spiritual eyes in the providences, as clearly, as the sun manifests himself by his own beams of light, Hab.* 3. 3, 4. *His brightness was as the light, and he had horns coming out of his hands, and there was the hiding of his power.* It is spoken of the Lord's going forth for his people in their deliverance from their enemies; and then he had horns, or rays and beams of power and mercy coming out of his hands; by

by h
and
are
tho
his p
Exod
uah,
prom
Th
great
to hi
be ca
word
and c
comp
his w
But
exper
faulter
think
sway
Lam.
tell m
mouth
your
hearts.
I. I
provisi
all the
ply'd
Was i
that se
III. 9
and at
ons, a
shut yo
of tha
from the
2. H
your p
have cl

by his hands, are meant his providential administrations and dispensations; and the horns that come out of them, are nothing else but the glorious display of his attributes in those providences. How did God make himself known to his people in that signal deliverance of them out of *Egypt*! *Exod.* 6. 3. then he was known to them by his name *Jehovah*, in giving Being by his providences to the mercies promised.

Thus when Christ shall give his people the last and greatest deliverance from antichrist, he shall shew himself to his people in a vesture dip'd in blood, and his name be called *The word of God*, *Rev.* 19. 12. His name was the word of God before; but then he was the word revealing and discovering the promises and truths of God; now accomplishing and fulfilling them. That his name is near, his wonderful works declare, *Psal.* 75. 1.

But more particularly, let us bring it home to our own experience. It may be, we find ourselves sometimes assaulted with atheistical thoughts: We are tempted to think God hath left all things below to the course and sway of nature, that our prayers reach him not, as it is *Lam.* 3. 44. that he regards not what evils befall us. But, tell me, saints, have you not enough at hand to stop the mouths of all such temptations? O do but reflect upon your own experiences! And solemnly ask your own hearts.

1. Have you never seen the allsufficient God in all the provisions he hath made for you and yours, throughout all the way that you have gone? Who was it that supply'd to you whatever was needful in all your straits? Was it not the Lord? *'Tis he that hath given bread to them that fear him, and hath been ever mindful of his covenant*, *Psal.* 111. 5. O do but consider the constancy, seasonableness, and at sometimes the extraordinariness, of these provisions, and how they have been given in upon prayer; and shut your eyes, if you can, against the convincing evidence of that great truth, *Job* 36. 7. *He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous.*

2. Have you not plainly discerned the care of God in your preservations from so many and great dangers as you have escaped and been carried through hitherto? How is it, that

that you have over-liv'd so many mortal dangers, sicknesses, accidnets, designs of enemies to ruin you? It is, I presume, beyond question with you, that the very finger of God hath been in these things, and that it is by his care alone, you have been preserved. When God had so signally delivered *David* from a dangerous disease, and the plots of enemies against him; *By this (said he) I know thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me*, Psal. 41. 11. He gathered from those gracious protections, the care God had over him.

3. Have you not plainly discerned the hand of God in the returns and accomplishments of your prayers? Nothing can be more evident than this, to men of observation, Psal. 34. 4, 5, 6. *I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him and were lightned, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.* Parallel to this, runs the experience of thousands and ten thousands of Christians this day; they know they have the petitions they asked of him. The mercy carries the very impress and stamp of the duty upon it. So that we can say, This is the mercy, the very mercy, I have so often sought God about. O how satisfying, and convincing are these things.

4. Have you not evidently discerned the Lord's hand, in the guiding and directing of your paths, to your unforeseen advantage? Things that you never projected for yourselves, have been brought about beyond all your thoughts. Many such things are with God; and which of all the saints hath not found that word, *Jer. 10. 23. verified by clear and undeniable experience? The way of man is not in himself.* I presume, if you will but look over the mercies you possess this day, you will find three to one, it may be ten to one, thus wrought by the Lord for you. And how satisfying, beyond all arguments in the world, are these experiences, That there is a God to whom his people are exceeding dear, *a God that performeth all things for them!*

5. Is it not fully convictive, that there is a God who takes care of you, inasmuch as you have found in all the temptations and difficulties of your lives his promises still fulfilled, and faithfully performed in all those conditions?

I appe
made
that
temple
also m
not th
your
left fo

The
will be
cellent
never
distress
had no
to its r
strongl
gencie
Philistin
aged h
proves
10. In
Christia
experie
not sati
nothing
bour to
corded
difficult
reader to

1. Ho
souls, w
those w
ence?
the obje
ritual s
sted, sel
more eas
is much

I appeal to yourselves, if you have not seen that promise made good, *Psal. 91. 15. I will be with him in trouble*; and that *1 Cor. 10. 13. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Have not these been as clearly made out by providence before your eyes, as the sun at noon-day? What room then is left for atheistical suggestions in your breasts?

Fourth Motive

The recording and recognizing of the performances of providence, will be a singular support to faith in future exigencies. This excellent use of it lies full in the very eye of the text. There never betel *David*, in all his troubles, a greater strait and distress than this; and doubtless his faith had staggered, had not the considerations of former providences come in to its relief. From this topick faith argues, and that very strongly and conclusively. So did *David's* faith in many exigencies: When he was to encounter the champion of the *Philistines*, it was from former providences that he encouraged himself, *1 Sam. 17. 73.* And the Apostle *Paul* improves his experiences to the same purpose, *2 Cor. 1. 9, 10.* Indeed the whole scripture is full of it: What Christian understands not the exceeding usefulness of those experiences he hath had to relieve and enliven: But I shall not satisfy myself with the common assertion, than which nothing is more trite in the lips of professors; but will labour to shew you, wherein the great usefulness of our recorded experiences, for encouraging faith labouring under difficulties, consists. To this purpose, I shall desire the reader to ponder seriously these following particulars.

1. How much advantage those things have upon our souls, which we have already felt and tasted, beyond those which were never relished by any former experience? What is experience, but the bringing down of the objects of faith to the dijudication and test of the spiritual sense? Now, when any thing hath been once tasted, felt and judged by a former experience, it is much more easily believed and received when it occurs again. It is much easier for faith to travel in a path that is well known

known to it, having formerly trod it, than to beat out a new one which it never trod, nor can see one step before it. Hence it is, tho' there be a difficulty in all the acts of faith, yet scarce in any like the first adventure it makes upon Christ; and the reason lies here, because in the subsequent acts it hath all its former experiences to aid and encourage it; but in the first adventure it hath none at all of its own, it takes a path which it never knew before.

To trust God without any trial or experience, is a more noble act of faith; but to trust him after we have often tried him, is known to be more easy. O 'tis no small advantage to a soul in a new plunge and distress, to be able to say, This is not the first time I have been in these deeps, and yet emerged out of them? Hence it was, that Christ rub'd up his disciples memories with what providence had formerly wrought for them in a day of straits, *Matth. 16. 8, 9, 10, 11.* *O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember? q. d.* Were ye never under any strait for bread before now; Is this the first difficulty that ever your faith combated with? No, no; you have felt straits, and experienced the power and care of God in supplying them, before now; and therefore I cannot but call you men of little faith; for a very ordinary and small measure of faith, assisted with so much experience as you have had, would enable you to trust God. There is as much difference betwixt believing before, and after experience, as there is betwixt swimming with bladders, and our first venture into the deep waters without them.

What a singular encouragement to faith do former experiences yield it, all by answering the pleas and objections of unbelief drawn from the object of faith? Now, there be two things that unbelief stumbles at in God; one is his power, the other his willingness to help.

(1.) Unbelief objects the impossibility of relief in deep distresses, *Psal. 78. 19.* *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people? O vile and unworthy thoughts of God! proceeding from our measuring the immense and boundless power of*

of Go
not wh
to be
vanqui
ces;
hand i
lity as
(2.)

ions,
merly
iness t
Paul r
to wh
Sam.
the go
to que
place i

(3.)
the ob
these c

(1.)
Now
pect,
true, w
Moses,
that o
lived
days.

We
all its
goodne
God h
appear
both i
still ex
serve i
by the
be saved

(2.)
sent co
and we

of God, by our own line and measure; because we see not which way relief should come, we conclude, none is to be expected. But all these reasonings of unbelief are vanquish'd by a serious reflection upon our own experiences; God hath helped, therefore he can, *Isa. 59. 1. His hand is not shortned, i. e. he hath as much power and ability as formerly.*

(2.) Unbelief objects against the will of God, and questions, whether he will now be gracious, tho' he hath formerly been so? But after so many experiences of his readiness to help, what room for doubting remains? Thus *Paul* reasoned from the experience of what he had done, to what he would do, *2 Cor. 1. 10.* and so did *David*, *1 Sam. 17. 36.* Indeed, if a man had never experienced the goodness of God to him, it were not so hainous a sin to question his willingness to do him good; but what place is left after such frequent trials?

(3.) It gives great encouragement to faith, as it answers the objections of unbelief drawn from the subject. Now these objections are of two sorts also.

(1.) Such as are drawn from our great unworthiness. Now (saith unbelief) can so sinful and vile a creature expect, that ever God should do this or that for me? 'Tis true, we find he did great things for *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, &c.* but these were men of eminent holiness, men that obeyed God, and denied themselves for him, and lived more in a day to his glory, than ever I did all my days.

Well, but what signifies all this to a soul, that under all its sensible vileness and unworthiness, hath tasted the goodness of God as well as they? As unworthy as I am, God hath been good to me notwithstanding: His mercy appeared first to me, when I was worse than I am now, both in condition and disposition; and therefore I will still expect a continuance of his goodness to me, tho' I deserve it not. *If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; how much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life, Rom. 5. 10.*

(2.) Such as are drawn from the extremity of our present condition, if troubles or dangers grow to an height and we see nothing but ruin and misery in the eye of reason-

son before us; now, unbelief becomes importunate and troublesome to the soul; now, where are thy prayers, thy hopes, yea, where is now thy God?

But all this is easily put by and avoided, by consulting our experiences in former cases. This is not the first time I have been in these straits, nor the first time I have had the same doubts and despondencies; and yet God hath carried me thro' all, *Psal.* 77. 7, 8, 9, &c. This is it that suffers not a Christian to unravel all his hopes in an hour of temptation. O how useful are these things to the people of God?

Fifth Motive.

The recognition of former providences will minister to your souls continual matter of praise and thanksgiving, which is the very employment of the angels in heaven, and the sweetest part of our lives on earth.

See *Psal.* 61. 7, 8. If God will prepare mercy and truth for David, he will prepare praises for his God, and that daily. So *Psal.* 71. 6. *By thee have I been holden up from the womb, thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels; (there mercies from the beginning are recognized.) My praise shall be continually of thee; there the natural result of those recognitions is expressed.*

There be five things belonging to the praise of God, and all of them have relation to his providences exercised about us.

1. A careful observation of the mercies we receive from him, *Isa.* 41. 17, 18, 19, 20. This is fundamental to all praise: God cannot be glorified for the mercies we never noted.

2. A faithful remembrance of the favours, received, *Psal.* 103. 2. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* Hence the Lord brands the ingratitude of his people, *Psal.* 106. 13. *They soon forgot his works.*

3. A due appretiation and valuation of every providence that doth us good, *1 Sam.* 12. 24. That providence that fed them in the wilderness with manna, was a most remarkable providence to them; but they not valuing it at its worth, God had not that praise for it which he expected, *Numb.* 11. 6.

4. T
soul in t
David,
that is a
soul of
fering.

5. A s
vid was
Hezekiah
sists in a
received
actually

Thus
spect to
you, th
providen
and eng
this end
exhibite

1. T
his peop
very ro
providen
ness and
engages
loving ki
give, m
dence:
kindnes
is but th
that cre
sanctific
dence a
else, bu
shewerh

As th
is a mot
of God,
soul to
David's
consider

4. The excitation of all the faculties and powers of the soul in the acknowledgment of these mercies to us. Thus David, *Psal.* 103. 1. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name. Soul-praise is the very soul of praise: This is the fat and marrow of thank-offering.

5. A suitable retribution for the mercies received. This David was careful about, *Psal.* 116 1. And the Lord taxes good Hezekiah for the neglect of it, *2 Chron.* 32. 24, 25. This consists in a full and hearty resignation of all to him, that we have received by providence from him: And in our willingness actually to part with all for him, when he shall remand it.

Thus you see, how all the ingredients to praise, have respect to providence. But more particularly, I will shew you, that as all the ingredients of praise have respect to providences, so all the motives and arguments obliging and engaging souls to praise, are found therein also. To this end consider, how the mercy and goodness of God is exhibited by providence, to excite our thankfulness.

1. That the goodness and mercy of God is let out upon his people in his providences about them; and this is the very root of praise. It is not so much the possession that providence gives us of such or such comforts, as the goodness and kindness of God in the dispensing of them, that engages a gracious soul to praise, *Psal.* 63. 3. *Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.* To give, maintain and preserve life, are choice acts of providence: But to do all this in a way of grace and loving kindness, this is far better than the gifts themselves; life is but the shadow of death without it: This is the mercy that crowns all other mercies, *Psal.* 103. 4. It is this a sanctified soul desires God would manifest in every providence about him, *Psal.* 17 7 and what is praising God else, but our shewing forth that loving kindness, which he sheweth us in his providence? *Psal.* 92. 1, 2.

As the loving-kindness of God manifested in providences, is a motive to praise; so the free and undeserved favours of God, dispensed by the hand of providence, oblige the soul to praise. This was the consideration that melted David's heart into a thankful praising frame, even the consideration of the free and undeserved favours cast in u-

pon

pon him by providence, 2 Sam. 7. 18. *What am I, O Lord God? And what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* i. e. raised me by providence from a mean condition to all this dignity; *from following the ewes, to feed Jacob his people*, Psal. 78. 70, 71. O! this it is that engages thankfulness, Gen. 32. 10.

3. As the freeness of mercies dispensed by providence engageth praise; so the multitudes of mercies heaped this way upon us, strongly oblige the soul to thankfulness. Thus *David* comes before the Lord encompassed with a multitude of mercies to praise him, Psal. 5. 7. We have our loads of mercies, and that every day, Psal 68 O what a rich heap will the mercies of one day make, being laid together.

4. As the multitudes of mercies, dispensed by providence oblige to praise; so the tenderness of God's mercy, manifested in his providence, leaves the soul under a strong obligation to thankfulness. We see what tender resentments the Lord hath of our wants, straits and burdens, Psal. 103. 13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*, He is full of bowels, as that word *poluplanchnos*, James 5. 11. signifies. Yea, there are not only bowels of compassion in our God, but the tenderness of bowels, like those of a mother to her sucking child, Isa. 49. 15. He feels all our pains, as if the apple of his eye were touched, Zech. 2. 8. and all this is discovered to his people in the way of his providences with them, Psal. 111. 2, 3, 4. O who of all the children of God hath not often found this in his providence! And who can see it, and not be filled with thankfulness! All these are so many bands clapt by providence upon the soul, to oblige it to a life of praise. Hence it is, that the prayers of the saints are so full of thanksgivings upon these accounts: 'Tis sweet to recount them to the Lord in prayer; to ly at his feet in an holy astonishment at his gracious condescensions to poor worms.

Sixth Motive.

The due observation of providence will endear Jesus Christ every day more and more to your souls. Christ is the channel of grace and mercy; thro' him are all the descents & reascen-

us gratiarum, all the streams of mercy that flow from God to us, and all the returns of praise from us to God, 1 Cor. 3. 21, 22. All things are ours upon no other title, but our being his.

Now there be three things in providence, that are exceedingly endearing of the Lord Jesus Christ to his people: And these are the most sweet and delicious parts of all our enjoyments

1. The purchase of all those mercies which providences convey to us, is by his own blood: For not only spiritual and eternal mercies, but even all our temporal ones are the acquisition of his blood. Look, as sin forfeited all, so Christ restored all these mercies again to us by his death. Sin had so shut up the womb of mercy, that, had not Christ been an atonement by his death, it could never have brought forth one mercy to all eternity for us. It is *with him* that God *freely gives us all things*, Rom 8. 32. Heaven itself, and all things needful to bring us thither, among which, is principally included the tutelage and aid of divine providence: so that, whatever good we receive from the hand of providence, we must put it upon the score of Christ's blood; and when we receive it, we may say, 'Tis the price of blood: 'Tis a mercy rising up out of the death of Christ; it cost him dear, tho' it come to me freely: It is sweet in the possession, but costly in the acquisition. Now, this is a most endearing consideration: Did Christ die, that these mercies might live: Did he pay his invaluable blood to purchase comforts that I possess? O what transcendent, matchless love, was the love of Christ? You have known parents that have laid out all their stock of money to purchase estates for their children; but when did you hear of any that spent the whole stock and treasure of their blood, to make a purchase for them? If the life of Christ had not been so afflictive and sad to him, ours could not have been so sweet and comfortable to us; 'tis thro' his poverty we are enriched, -2 Cor. 8. 9. These sweet mercies that are born of providence every day, are the fruits of the travel of his soul.

2. The sanctification of all is by our union with Christ: 'Tis by vertue of our union with his person that we enjoy the

the sanctified gifts and blessings of providence. All these are mercies additional to that great mercy *CHRIST*, *Matth.* 6. 33. they are given with him, as in *Rom.* 8. 32. This is the tenure by which we hold them, *1 Cor.* 3. 21, 22, 23. Look, what we lost in *Adam*, is restored again with advantage in *Christ*: Immediately upon the fall, that curse, *Gen.* 2. 17. seized upon all the miserable posterity of *Adam*, and upon all their comforts, outward as well as inward; and this still lies heavy upon them: All that providence doth for them that are Christless, is but to feed so many poor condemned wretches, till the sentence they are under be executed upon them: It is indeed bountiful and open-handed to many of them, and fills them with earthly comforts; but not one special sanctified mercy is to be found among all their enjoyments: These gifts of providence do but deceive, defile and destroy them thro' their own corruptions, and for want of union with Christ, *Prov.* 1. 32. *The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.*

But when a man is once in Christ, then all providences are sanctified and sweet *Tit.* 1. 15. *Unto the pure, all things are pure.* A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the treasures of many wicked, *Psal.* 37. 16. Now, Christ becomes an head of influence, as well as of dominion; and in all things he consults the good of his own members, *Eph.* 1. 22.

The dispensation of all our comforts and mercies, is by his direction and appointment. It is true, the angels are employed in the kingdom of providence; they move the wheels, *i. e.* are instrumental in all the revolutions in this lower world; but still they receive directions and orders from Christ, as you may see in that admirable scheme of providences, *Ezek.* 1. 25, 26 &c. Now, what an endearing meditation is this! What ever creature be instrumental for any good to you, it is your Lord Jesus Christ that gave the orders and commands to that creature to do it; and without it they could have done nothing for you: It is your head in heaven that consults your peace and comfort on earth; these be the fruits of his care for you. So in the prevention and restraints of evil, 'tis he that bridles in the wrath of devils and men; he holds the reins in his own hands, *Rev.* 2. 10. It was the care of Christ

over

over his poor sheep at *Damascus*, that stop'd the raging adversary who was upon the way, designing to destroy them, *Acts* 9.

4. The continuation of all your mercies and comforts, outward as well as inward, is the fruit of his intercession in heaven for you. For look, as the offering up of the Lamb of God, a sacrifice for sin, opened the door of mercy at first; so his appearing before God as a Lamb that had been slain, still keeps that door of mercy open, *Rev.* 5. 6. *Heb.* 9. 24 By this his intercession, our peace and comforts are prolonged to us, *Zeck.* 1. 12, 13. Every sin we commit would put an end to the mercies we possess, were it not for that caution which is put in for us by it, *1 John* 2. 1, 2. *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, &c.* This stops all pleas, and procures new pardons for new sins. Hence it is *he saves to the uttermost*, to the last compleating act, *Heb.* 7. 25. New sins do not irritate our former pardons, nor cut off our privileges settled upon us in Christ.

5. The returns and answers of all your prayers and cries to heaven for the removing of your afflictions, or supply of your wants, are all procured and obtained for you by Jesus Christ. He is the master of your requests; and were it not that God had respect to him, he would never regard your cries to him, nor return any answer of peace to you, how great soever your distresses should be, *Rev.* 8. 3, 4. 'Tis his name that gives our prayers their acceptance, *John* 15. 16. Because the Father can deny nothing, therefore our prayers are not denied. Doth God condescend to hear you in the day of trouble? Doth he convince you by your own experience that your prayers have power with God, and do prevail? O see how much you owe to your dear Lord Jesus Christ, for this high and glorious privilege!

6. The covenant of grace, in which all your comfortable enjoyments are comprized, and by which they are secured, sanctified, and sweetned to you, is made in Christ, and ratified by him betwixt God and you. Your mercies are all comprized in this covenant, even your daily bread,

bread, *Psal.* 111. 5. as well as your justification, and other spiritual mercies.

'Tis your covenant interest, that secures to you whatever it comprizes, *Isa.* 55. 3. hence they are called the sure mercies of *David*.

Nay, this is it that sanctifies them, and gives them the nature of special and peculiar mercies. One such mercy is worth a thousand common mercies; and being sanctified and special mercies, they must needs be exceeding sweet beyond all other mercies. On these accounts it was, that *David* so rejoiced in his covenant interest, tho' laden with many afflictions, *2 Sam.* 23. 5.

But now all this hangs entirely upon Christ. The new testament is in his blood, *1 Cor.* 11. 25. and whatever mercies you reap from that covenant, you must thank the Lord Jesus Christ for them. Put all this together, and then think how such considerations will endear Christ to your souls.

Seventh Motive.

The due observations of Providence have a marvellous efficacy to melt the heart, and make it thaw and relent ingenuously before the Lord.

How can a sanctified heart do less, than melt into tears, whilst it either considers the dealings of God from time to time with it; or compares the mercies received, with the sins committed, or the different administrations of providence towards itself and others!

Let a man but set himself to think deliberately and closely of the ways of providence towards him, let him follow the tract of providence as it hath led him all along the way that he hath gone; and if there be any principle of gracious tenderness in him, he shall meet with variety of occasions to excite and draw it forth.

Reader, go back with thy serious thoughts, 1. To the beginning of the ways of God with thee, the mercies that brake out early in thy youth, even the first born mercies from the womb of providence; and thou wilt say, What need I go farther? Here is enough, not only to

move,

mo
cry
4.
mo
of
the
prop
man
then
ver
like
after
whe
sollie
and
after
amo
form
thee
seen
lowi
ther,
2.
of af
remo
we
than
for us
not bee
emine
have
have
signed
3.
dence
thee,
sense
require
a plac
or con
dence.

move, but overwhelm my heart. *May I not from this time cry unto thee, my Father thou art the guide of my youth; Jer. 3.*

4. What a critical time is the time of youth? It is the moulding age; and (ordinarily) according to the course of those leading providences, after providences do steer their course, What levity, rashness, ignorance and strong propensions to sin and ruin accompanied that age? How many being then left to the sway of their own lusts, run themselves into those sins and miseries, which they never recover themselves from to their dying day! These, like the errors of the first concoction, are rarely rectified afterwards. Did the Lord guide thee by his providence, when but a child? Did he then preserve thee from those follies and miscarriages, which blast the very blossom, and nip the bud, so that no good fruit is to be expected afterwards? Did he then cast thee into such families, or among such company and acquaintance, as moulded and formed thy spirit to a better temper? Did he then direct thee into the way of employment, wherein thou hast seen so large a train of happy consequents ever since following thee? And wilt thou nor henceforth say, *My Father, my father, thou art the guide of my youth?—Or,*

2. Let us but bring our thoughts close to the providences of after times, and consider how the several changes and removes of our lives have been ordered for us: Things we never foresaw nor designed (but much better for us, than what we did design) have been all along ordered for us. *The way of man is not in himself: God's thoughts have not been as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.* Among the eminent mercies of thy life, reader, how many of them have been mere surprisals to thee! Thy own projects have been thrust aside, to make way for better things designed by providence for thee. Nay,

3. Do but observe the springs and autumns of providence, in what order they have flourished and faded with thee, and thou wilt find thyself overpowered with the sense of divine wisdom and goodness: When necessity required, such a friend was stirred up to help thee, such a place opened to receive thee, such a relation raised up or continued to refresh thee; and no sooner doth providence deprive thee of any of them, but either thy need of

them ceases, or some other way is opened to thee. O the depth of God's wisdom and goodness! O the matchless tenderness of God to his people!

4. Compare the dealings of providence with you and others, yea, with others that sprang up with you in the same generation, it may be in the same families, and from the same parents, it may be in families, greater and more flourishing in the world than yours; and see the difference, upon many great accounts, it hath made betwixt you and them. I knew a Christian, who after many years separation, was visited by his own brother, the very sight of whom, wrought upon him, much as the sight of *Benjamin* did upon *Joseph*, so that he could not refrain to fall upon his neck, and weep for joy; but after a few hours spent together, finding the spirit of his brother, not only estranged to all that's spiritual and serious, but also very vain and prophane, he hastned to his chamber, shut the door upon him, threw himself at the feet of God, and with flowing eyes, and a melting heart, admired the distinguishing grace of God, saying, Was not *Esau* *Jacob's* bother? O grace, grace! astonishing grace!

5. Compare the carriage of providence towards you, with your own carriage towards the Lord; and it must needs melt your hearts to find so much mercy bestowed, where so much sin hath been committed. What place did you ever live in, where you cannot remember great provocations committed, and manifold mercies notwithstanding that, received? O with how many *notwithstanding's* and *nevertheless's*, hath the Lord done you good in every place! What relation hath not been abused by sin; and yet both raised up and continued by providence for your comfort! In every place God hath left the marks of his goodness, and you the remembrances of your sinfulness: Give yourselves but leave to think of these things, and it is strange if your hearts relent not at the remembrance of them. And.

6. or *Lastly*. Do but compare your dangers with your fears, and both with the strange out-lets and doors of escape providence hath opened, and it cannot do less than overpower you with a full sense of divine care and goodness.

There

There have been dark clouds seen to rise over you, judgment even at your door, sometimes threatening your life, sometimes your liberty, sometimes your estates, and sometimes your dearest relations, in whom, it may be, your life was bound up; remember in that day, what faintness of spirit seized you, what charges of guilt stirring up tears of the issue within you: You turned to the Lord in that distress, and hath he not made a way to escape, and delivered you from all your fears? *Psal. 34. 4.*

Oh! Is your life such a continued throng, such a distracted hurry, that there is no room to be found with Christians to sit alone, and think on these things, and press these marvelous discoveries of God in his providences upon their own hearts! Surely, might these things burly upon our hearts, talk with our thoughts by day, and lodge with us at night; they would even force their passage down to our very reins.

Eighth Motive.

Due observation of Providence will both beget and secure inward tranquillity in your minds, amidst the vicissitudes and revolutions of things in this unstable vain world.

Psal. 4. 8. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for the Lord only maketh me to dwell in safety. He resolves, the sinful fears of events shall not rob him of his inward quiet, nor torture his thoughts with anxious presages: He will commit all his concerns into that faithful fatherly hand, that had hitherto wrought all things for him, and he means not to lose the comfort of one nights rest, nor bring the evil of to-morrow on the day, but knowing in whose hand he was, wisely enjoys the sweet felicity of a resigned will.

Now, this tranquillity of our minds is as much begotten and preserved by a due consideration of providence, as by any thing whatsoever. Hence it was that our Lord Jesus Christ, when he would cure the disciples anxious and distracting solitudes about a livelihood, bids them consider the care providence hath over the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, how it feeds the one,

and clothes the other without any anxious care of theirs; and would have them well consider those providences, and reason themselves into a calm and sweet composure of spirit from those considerations, *Mat. 6. 72, 28, 29, 30, 31.*

Two things destroy the peace and tranquillity of our lives, our bewailing past disappointments, or fearing future ones. But would we once learn prevision and provision to be divine prerogatives, and take notice how often providence baffles those that pretend to it, causing the good they foresaw (according to their conjectures) coming to their hand, yet to baulk them and flee from them; and the evil they thought themselves sufficiently secured from, to invade them. I say, would we consider how providence daily baffles these pretensions of men, and asserts his own dominion, it would greatly conduce to the tranquillity of our lives.

This is a great truth, and there is no face of adversity so formidable, but being viewed from this station, would become amicable. Now, there be several things in the consideration of providence, that naturally and kindly compose the mind of a Christian to peace, and bring it to a sweet rest, whilst events hang in a doubtful suspense.

As 1. The supremacy of providence, and its uncontrollable power in working. This is often seen in the good that it brings us, in a way that's above the thoughts and cares of our minds, or labour of our hands. *I had not thought (said Jacob) to have seen thy face; and lo, God hath shewed me thy seed also, Gen. 48. 11.* There is a frequent coincidence of providences in a way of surprisal, which from no appearance, or the remotest tendency of outward causes could be foreseen, but rather falls visibly cross to the present scheme and posture of our affairs. Nothing tends to convince us of the vanity and folly of our own sollicitudes and projections, more than this doth.

2. The profound wisdom of providence in all that it performeth for the people of God. The wheels are full of eyes, *Ezek. 1. 18. i. e.* there is an intelligent and wise spirit that sits upon, and governs the affairs of this world.

This wisdom shines out to us in the unexpected, yea,
contrary

contrary events of things. How often have we been courting some beautiful appearance that invited our senses, and with trembling shun'd the formidable face of other things, when notwithstanding the issues of providence have convinced us, that our danger lay in what we courted, and our good in what we so studiously declined? This also is a sweet principle of peace and quiet to the Christian's mind, that he knows not, but his good may be imported in what seemed to threaten his ruin. Many were the distresses and straits of *Israel* in the wilderness, but all was to humble them, that he might do them good in the latter end, *Duet. 8 16*. Sad and dismal was the face of providence that sent them out of their own land, into the land of the *Chaldeans*; yet even this was a project to do them good, *Jer. 24. 5*. How often have we retracted our rash and headlong censures of things upon experience of this truth, and been taught to bless our afflictions and disappointments in the name of the Lord! Many a time have we kissed those troubles at parting, which we met with trembling. And what can promote peace under doubtful providences more effectually than this.

3. The experiences we have had throughout our lives of the faithfulness and constancy of providence, are of excellent use to allay and quiet our hearts in any trouble that befalls us. *Hitherto hath God helped*, *1 Sam. 7. 12*. We never found him wanting to us in any case hitherto; this is not the first strait we have been in, the first time that our hopes and hearts have been low. Surely, he is the same God now as heretofore, his hand is not shortned, neither doth his faithfulness fail. O recount in how great extremities former experience hath taught you not to despair.

4. The conjectures Christians may make of the way of providence towards them, from what its former methods have been towards them, is exceeding quiet and comfortable. 'Tis usual with Christians, to compare times with times, and to guess at the issue of one providence by another. The saints do know what course providence usually holds, and accordingly with great probability collect what they may expect from what in like cases they have

formerly observed. Christian, examine thine own heart, and its former observations, and thou wilt find, as *Psal.* 89. 30, 31, 32. that it is usually the way of God to prepare some smart rods to correct thee, when either thy heart hath secretly revolted from God, and is grown vain, careless and sensual, or when thy steps have declined, and thou hast turned aside to the commission of iniquity. And then when those rods have been sanctified to humble, reduce and purge thy heart, it is usually observed, that those sad providences are then upon the change, and then the Lord changes the voice of his providence towards thee, *Jer.* 3. 12, 13. *Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: Only acknowledge thine iniquity, &c.*

If therefore I find the blessed effects of the rod upon me, that it hath done its work, to break the hard heart, and pull down the proud heart, and awaken the drowsy heart, and quicken the slothful, negligent, lazy heart; now, with great probability, I may conjecture a more comfortable aspect of providence will quickly appear, the refreshing and reviving time is nigh.

5. It is usual with Christians, to argue themselves into fresh reviving hopes, when the state of things is most forlorn, by comparing the providences of God one with another.

(1.) It is a mighty composing meditation, when we compare the providences of God towards the inanimate and irrational creatures, with his providences towards us. Doth he take care for the very fowls of the air, for whom no man provides, as well as those at the door which we daily feed? Doth he so clothe the very grass of the field, hear the young ravens, when they cry for meat? And can it be supposed, he should forget his own people, that are of much more value than these?

(2.) Or, if we compare the bounty and care that providence hath expressed to the enemies of God, how it feeds and clothes and protects them, even whilst they are fighting against him with his own mercies; it cannot but quiet and satisfy us, that surely he will not be wanting to that

that
hath
ven

wha
wher
ty a
kne
not
cies
pro
reco
S
foul
the

D
us, k
prov

I
wor
all
used
may
to a
pure
limi
tion
is no
fun-
Duct
are
right
a pe
all
is no
- 2
by fl
note

that people upon whom he hath set his love, to whom he hath given his Son, and for whom he hath designed heaven itself. — Or,

(3.) and *Lastly*, It must needs quiet us, when we consider, what the Lord did for us in the way of his providence, when we ourselves were in the state of nature, and enmity against God. Did he not then look after us, when we knew him not? Provided for us when we owned him not in any of his mercies? Bestowed thousands of mercies upon us, when we had no title to Christ, or any one promise? And will he now do less for us, since we are reconciled and become his children?

Surely, such considerations as these, cannot but fill the soul with peace, and preserve the tranquillity of it under the most distracting providences.

Ninth Motive.

Due observations of the ways of God in his Providences towards us, have an excellent usefulness and aptitude to advance and improve holiness in our hearts and lives. For,

1. The holiness of God is manifested to us in all his works of Providence, *Psal. 145. 27. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* The instruments used by providence, may be very sinful and wicked, they may aim at base ends, and make use of wicked mediums to attain them; but it is certain, God's designs are most pure, and all his workings are so too. Tho' he permits, limits, orders and over-rules many unholy persons and actions, yet in all he works like himself; and his holiness is no mote defiled and stained by their impurity, than the sun-beams are by the noisome exhalations of a dunghill *Duet 32. 5. He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; Just and right is he.* So that, in all his providences, he sets before us a perfect pattern of holiness, that we might be holy in all our ways, as our Father is in all his ways. But this is not all.

2. His providences, if duly observed, promote holiness by stopping up our way to sin. Oh! If men would but note the designs of God in his preventive providences,

how useful would it be to keep the upright and holy in their ways. For why is it, that the Lord so often hedges up our way with thorns, as it is, *Hosea 2. 6.* but that we should not find our paths to sin? Why doth he clog us, but to prevent our straying from him? *2 Cor. 12. 7.* *Left I should be exalted above measure, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.* O 'tis good to attend to these works of God, and study the meaning of them. Sometimes providence crosseth a hopeful thriving project to advance our estate, and frustrates all our labours and cares; Why is this, but to hide pride from man? Shouldst thou prosper in the world, that prosperity might be thy snare, and make thee a proud, sensual, vain soul; the Lord Jesus sees this, and therefore withdraws the food and fuel from thy corruptions.

It may be thou hast a crazy, diseased, weak body, thou labourest under often infirmities; in this, the wisdom and care of God over thy soul is manifested; for wert thou not so clogged, how probable is it, that much more guilt might be contracted? Your poverty doth but clog your pride; reproaches clog your ambition; want prevents wantonness; sickness of body conduces to the prevention of many inward gripes of conscience, and groans under guilt.

3. The providences of God may be observed to conduce to our holiness, not only by preventing sin, that we may not fall into it; but also by purging our sins when we are fallen into them, *Isa. 27. 9.* *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.* So *Dan. 11. 33, 34, 35.* They are of the same use that fire and water are for purging and cleansing; not that they can purge us from sin in their own virtue and power, for if so, those that have most afflictions, would have most grace also; but it is in the virtue of Christ's blood, and and God's blessing upon afflictive providences, that they purge us from sin. A cross without a CHRIST never did any good. Now in God's afflictive providences for sin, there are many things that tend to the purging of it: For,

(1.) Such rebukes of providence discover the displeasure of God against us: The Lord frowns upon us in those

tho
the
of a
chil
is m
of t
3.
thy
kane
of th
sin.

(
ed
clea
prov
we
thee
fore
forfa
the L
in ic

(3
the p
nor.
of th
way

(4
warn
I hav
provi
ver a
This
a goo
carefu
sorrow

O! I
hath
for i
the s
me to
ed en

those providences. Our Father is angry, and these are the tokens of it ; and nothing works more to the melting of a gracious heart than this. Must not the heart of a child melt and break whilst the father is angry ? O this is more bitter to our spirits than all the smart and anguish of the affliction can be to our flesh. See *Psalm*. 38. 1, 2. 3. O Lord rebuke me not in thy wrath ; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure : For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thine hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger ; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.

(2.) By these rebukes of sin, the evil of sin is discovered more sensibly to us, and we are made to see more clearly the evil of it in these glasses of affliction which providence at such times sets before us, than formerly we we ever saw. *Jer.* 2. 19. Thine own wickedness shall correct thee ; and thy backslidings shall reprove thee : Know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of Hosts. O the gall and worm-wood that we taste in it under God's rebukes for it.

(3.) Providence blasts and frustrates all sinful projects to the people of God ; whoever thrives in them, they shall not. *Isa.* 30. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And this also convinces them of the folly that is in sin, and makes them cleave to the way of simplicity and integrity.

(4.) Holiness is promoted in the soul by cautioning and warning the soul against sin for time to come *Job* 34. 31. I have born chastisement, I will not offend any more. O happy providences, how smart soever, that make the soul forever afraid of sin ! Surely such rods are well bestow'd. This gives God his end : And if ever we sorrowed after a godly sort, in the day of our troubles, it will work this carefulness, *2 Cor.* 7. 11. Behold this self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, &c. O ! If ever a man have been under a sanctified rod, which hath shewed him the evil of sin, and kindly humbled him for it, and a temptation should again sollicit him to the same evil ; Why, thinks he, what a madness is it for me to buy repentance at so dear a rate ? Have I not smarted enough already ? You may as well ask me, whether I
will

will run again into the fire, after I have been already scorch'd in it.

(5.) To conclude, providences do greatly improve and promote holiness by drawing the soul into the presence of God, and giving it the opportunity and occasion of much communion with him. Comfortable providences will do this, they will melt a man's heart in love to the God of his mercies, and so pain his bowels that he shall not be quiet, till he have found a place to pour out his soul in thankfulness to the Lord, 2 Sam. 7. 18.

Afflictive providences will drive us to the feet of God, and there make us to judge and condemn ourselves. And all this hath an excellent use to destroy sin, and promote holiness in the soul.

Tenth Motive.

Lastly, *The consideration and study of Providence will be of singular use to us in a dying hour.* Hereby we treasure up that which will singularly sweeten our death to us, and greatly assist our faith in the last encounters. You find when Jacob died, what reflections he had upon the dealings of God with him in the various providences of his life. See Gen. 48. 3, 7, 15, 16. In like manner you find Joshua recording the providences of God, when at the very brink of the grave; they were the subject of his dying discourse, Josh. 24. And I cannot but think it a sweet close to the life of any Christian: It must needs sweeten a death-bed, to recount there the several remarkable passages of God's care and love to us from our beginning to that day; to reflect upon the mercies that went along with us all the way, when we are come to the end of it. O Christians! Treasure up these instances for such a time as that is, that you may go out of the world blessing God for all the goodness and truth he hath performed to you all your life long. Now, the meditations of these things must needs be of great use in that day, if you consider the following particulars.

1. The time of death is the time when souls are usually most violently assaulted by Satan with horrid temptations and black suggestions. We may say of that figurative, as

it

it is
ducit
ence
faint
for
cry
then
yea,
less
73.
go t
man
B
with
long
wan
evid
of G
this
peric
fer t
so of
hath
his:
cann
like
own
48.
our g
and
the E
have
and g
2.
of m
them
ing
new
mem
Fathe

it is said of the natural serpent, *nunquam nisi moriens, producit in longum*; he never exerts his utmost rage till the last encounter; and then his great design is to persuade the saints, that God loves them not, hath no care nor regard for them, nor their cries, tho' they pray for ease, and cry for sparing mercy, they see none comes: He handles them with as much roughness and severity as other men; yea, many of the vilest and most dissolute wretches endure less torments, and are more gently handled than they, *Psal. 73. 4. There are no bands in their death*; when as thou must go thro' a long lane of sickness to the grave, and endure many deaths in one.

But, what credit can these plausible tales of *Satan* obtain with a Christian, who hath been treasuring up all his life long the memorials of God's tender regard both to his wants and prayers, and that hath carefully remarked the evident returns of his prayers, and gracious condescensions of God to him from his beginning to that moment? In this case, his faith is mightily assisted by thousands of experiences which back and encourage it, and will not suffer the soul to give up, so easily, a truth which he hath so often sensibly felt and tasted. I am sure (saith he) God hath had a tender fatherly care of me ever since I became his: he never failed me yet in any former strait and I cannot believe he will do so now: I know his love is like himself, unchangeable, *John 13. 1. Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. Psal. 48. 14. For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death* Did he love me in my youth, and will he cast me off in my decrepid age? O God (saith the Psalmist) *thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works; now also, when I am old and gray headed, O God forsake me not, Psal. 71. 17, 18.*

2. At death, the saints are engaged in the last, and one of most eminent works of faith, even the committing themselves into the hands of God; when we are launching forth into that vast eternity, and entering into that new stage which will make so great a change upon us in a moment. In this Christ sets us a pattern *Luke 23. 46. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus*

thus gave up the ghost. So Stephen at his death, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; and immediately fell asleep*, Acts 7. 59.

There be two signal and remarkable acts of faith, both exceedingly difficult, *viz.* its *first* act, and its *last*. The *first* is, a great venture that it makes of itself upon Christ; and the *last* is, a great venture too, to cast itself into the ocean of eternity upon the credit of a promise. But yet I know the first adventure of the soul upon Christ is much more difficult than the last adventure upon death; and that which makes it so, is, in great measure, the manifold recorded experiences that the soul hath been gathering up from the day of its espousals to Christ unto its dying, which is (in a sense) its marriage-day. Oh! With what encouragement may a soul throw himself into the arms of that God, with whom he hath so long conversed and walked in this world; whose visits have been sweet and frequent; with whom the soul hath contracted so intimate acquaintance in this world; whom it hath committed all its affairs to formerly, and still found him a faithful God; and now hath no reason to doubt, but it shall find him so in this last distress and exigence also.

3. At death, the people of God receive the last mercies that ever they shall receive in this world by the hand of providence, and are immediately to make up their accounts with God for all the mercies that ever they received from his hand. What can be more suitable therefore to a dying person, than to recount with himself the mercies of his whole life, the manifold receipts of favour, for which he is to reckon with God speedily? And how shall this be done without a due and serious observation and recording of them now? I know there are thousands of mercies forgotten by the best of Christians; a memory of brass cannot contain them: And I know also that Jesus Christ must make up the account for us, else it will never pass with God; yet it is our duty to keep the accounts of our own mercies, and how they have been improv'd by us, for we are stewards, and then are to give an account of our stewardship.

4. At death, we owe an account also to men, and stand obliged (if there be opportunity for it) to make known to them that survive us what we have seen and found of God
ip

in the
men
dying
of h
the l
God
an a
spee
clear
how
title
I am
and
thing
come

A
unde
dyin
wise
that
O th
lives
go o
truth
this
cal w
in th

5.
than
emph
whic
of th
it wi
whil
enter
daily
and o
to!

An
ment

in this world, that we may leave a testimony for God with men, and bring up a good report upon his ways. Thus dying *Jacob*, when *Joseph* was come to take his last farewell of him in this world, strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed, and related to him the eminent appearances of God to him, and the places where, *Gen.* 48. 2. 3. as also an account of his afflictions, *ver.* 7. So *Jeshua*, in his last speech to the people, makes it his business to vindicate and clear the truth of the promises, by recounting to them how the providence of God had fulfill'd the same to a title in his day, *Josh.* 23. 14. *And behold (saith he) this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: All are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.*

And certainly 'tis of great importance to the world, to understand the judgments, and hear of the experiences of dying men. They, of all men, are presumed to be most wise and most serious: Besides, this is the last opportunity that ever we shall have in this world to speak for God. O then, what a sweet thing would it be to close up our lives with an honourable account of the ways of God! to go out of the world blessing him for all the mercies and truth which he hath here performed to us! How would this encourage weak Christians, and convince the atheistical world, that verily there is a reality and an excellency in the ways and people of God!

5. At death, we begin the angelical life of praise and thanksgiving. We then enter upon that everlasting sweet employment; and as I doubt not, but the providences, in which we were concerned in this world, will be a part of that song which we shall sing in heaven, so certainly it will become us to tune our hearts and tongues for it whilst we are here; and especially when we are ready to enter upon that blessed state. O therefore, let it be your daily meditation and study what God hath been to you, and done for you, from the beginning of his way hitherto!

And thus I have spread before you some encouragements to this blessed work. O that you would be persuaded-

Second Corollary.

If God perform all things for you, how great is his condescension to, and care over his people! What is man (saith Job, chap. 7. ver. 17. 18.) that thou shouldst magnifie him, and set thine heart upon him, and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment? Such is his tender care over you, that he withdraws not his eye from you, See Job 36. 7. Left any hurt you, he himself will guard and keep you day and night, Isa. 27. 3. Should he withdraw his eye or hand one moment from you, that moment would be your ruin. Ten thousand evils watch but for such an opportunity, to rush in upon you, and destroy you and all your comforts. You are too dear to him to be trusted in any hand but his own, Duet 33. 3. *All his saints are in thy hand.*

Third Corollary.

Learn hence how you are obliged to perform all duties and services for God, who performeth all things for you. It was the wish of a good man, *optarem id me esse Deo, quod est mihi manus mea*, O that I could be to God what my hand is to me! *Viz.* a serviceable useful instrument. Shall God do all things for you, and will you do nothing for God? Is providence every moment at work for you, and will you be idle? To what purpose then is all that God hath done for you? Is it not the aim and design of all, to make you a fruitful people? If God plant, and sence, and water you by providence, sure he looks you should bring forth fruit, Isa. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4. O that in return for all the benefits of providence, you would say to God, as grateful *Elisba* said to the *Shunammite*, Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care, what is to be done for thee? 1 Kings 1. 13. And *David*, Psal. 116. 12. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefices towards me? He is ever doing you good; be you always abounding in his work. His providence stands by you in your greatest distresses and dangers; don't you flinch from God, when his service and your duty is com-

compassed about with difficulties. O be active for that God who is acting every moment for you.

Fourth Corollary.

Doth God perform all things for his people? *Do not distrust him then as often as new or great difficulties arise.* Why should you so think, he that hath done many things for you, will now do no more? Surely, *the Lord's hand is not shortned that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear*; if any thing put a stop to his mercy, 'tis your iniquities, your distrust and infidelity. *Isa. 59. 1. How long will it be ere you believe him?* If a thousand* and ten thousand of trials and experiences of his tender care, faithfulness and love will cure this distemper in you, you have them at hand to do it. If the frequent consultations of this your distrust by the unexpected breakings out of mercy for you under the like discouragements will cure it, look back and you may see them. Certainly you have been often forced by providence with shame and repentance to retract your rash censures of his care; and yet will you fall into the same distemper again? Oh! That you would once learn this great truth, that no man ever wanted that mercy, which he wanted not an heart to trust and wait quietly upon God for: You never yet sought God in vain, except when you sought him vainly.

Fifth Corollary.

Doth God perform all things for you? *Then seek God for all by prayer, and never undertake any design without him.* Certainly, if he do not perform it for you, you can never have what you desire and labour for: And tho' he have designed to perform this or that mercy for you, yet for these things he will be enquired of, that he may do it for you: *Ezek. 36. 37.* I reckon that business as good as if it were in hand, that trouble as good as over, for the doing, enjoying, or removing whereof we have engaged God by prayer. 'Tis our folly to engage that instrument and that for us, to attempt this way and not to compass our design, and all the while forget him upon whose pleasure

sure
whic
com
er m
perf

L
great
upon

It

" Ne

" stia

" tha

" suc

" tin

" uif

" as i

" wh

" fer

" the

" tra

" wh

confo

them

Christu

Luther

Whe

God,

to do

confu

there

was,

world

tiaring

If Go

substi

" (saic

" scrip

sure all instruments and means entirely depend. That which begins not with prayer, seldom winds up with comfort. *The way of man is not in himself*; if it were, prayer might then be reckon'd lost labour. O let him that performs all, be owned and acknowledged in all!

Sixth Corollary.

Lastly, If God perform all things for us, *Then it is our great interest and concernment in all things to study to please him, upon whom we depend for all things.*

It is a grave and weighty observation of *Chrysostome*. "Nothing (saith he) should be grievous and bitter to a Christian, but to provoke the displeasure of God. Avoid that, and no affliction or trouble whatever can cast down such a prudent soul; but even as a spark is easily extinguished in the sea, so will the favour of God extinguish those troubles." "It is with such a soul (saith he) as it is with the heavens; we think the heavens suffer when they are overspread with clouds, and the sun suffers when it is eclipsed, but there is no such thing; they suffer not when they seem to suffer. *Tranquillus Deus, tranquillat omnia.* Every thing is well, and shall be well, when all is well betwixt us and God." The great consolation of the saints lies in this, that all that concerns them is in the hands of their father, *Pene desperassem, nisi Christus esset caput Ecclesie.* I had utterly despair'd (saith *Luther*) had not Christ been the head of the church. When he that performs all things is our God, even our God, that delights in our prosperity, that rejoices over us to do us good, what ample security is here in the greatest confusions and dangers? When one told *Bouromeus* that there were some that laid wait for his life, his answer was, *An Deus est in mundo pro nihilo?* What is God in the world for nothing? And as notable was the reply of *Silentiarius* in a like case, *si Deus mei curam non habet, quid vivo?* If God take no care of me, how do I live, how have I subsisted hitherto? "Tho' it seems a *Romance* to many (saith a late grave author) yet we must either quire the scripture, or give credit to this, that the most infallible

"rules

"for one to raise his fortune, and ensure a destiny that can controul the stars, are given forth there (*viz.* in the scripture) where that evidently is found, *Sapiens dominabitur astris, & quomodo unusquisque faber potest esse fortuna sua.*" A good man may even be his own carver." O that we would but steer our course according to those rare politricks of the Bible, those divine maxims of wisdom. Fear nothing but sin; study nothing so much as how to please God: Warp not from your own integrity under any temptation; trust God in the way of your duty.—These are sure rules to secure yourselves and your interest in all the vicissitudes of this life.

MY last work will be, to state three or four practical cases about this subject, and so I shall shut up this discourse upon Providence.

FIRST CASE.

HOW may a Christian discover the will of God, and his own duty, under dark and doubtful providences?

In order to the clearing of this case, we are to consider, what is meant by the will of God; what by those doubtful providences, that make the discovery of his will difficult; and what rules are to be observed for the clearing up of God's will to ourselves under such difficult and puzzling providences.

1. As to the will of God, it falls under a twofold consideration, of his secret and revealed will. This distinction is found in that scripture, *Deut 29. 29. The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us.* &c. The first is the rule of his own actions; the latter of ours: And this only is concerned in the Query.

This revealed will of God is either manifested to us in his word, or in his works. The former is his commanding will, the latter is his effecting or permitting will; the one versant about good, the other about evil.

In
with
vealed
grees
(1.
ence:
reveal
eviden
things
obscun
(2.
there
babes,
of wea
is rece
son re
plain
is eve
do.

(3.
also v
peculi
about
king,
9,10,1
by the
duty a
of it.
But
of the
traord
have,
cases,
find no
case, t
selves
toward

2.
cases w
loss w
God, w

In these ways God manifests his will to men, but yet with great variety and difference, both as to the things revealed, the persons to whom he reveals them, and the degrees of clearness in which they are revealed.

(1.) As to the things revealed, there is great difference: For the great and necessary duties of religion are revealed to us in the word, with greatest perspicuity and evidence. About these there can be no hesitation; but things of a lower nature, and lesser concern are left more obscure.

(2.) As to the persons to whom God reveals his will, there is great difference; some are strong men, others babes, 1 Cor. 3. 1. Some have senses exercised, others of weak and dull understanding; and we know every thing is received according to the ability and measure of the person receiving it. Hence it is, that one man's way is very plain before him, he knows what he ought to do; the other is ever and anon at a loss, bivious and uncertain what to do.

(3.) The manner of God's revealing his will to men is also very different. Some have had special, personal, and peculiar discoveries of it made to them. So had *Samuel* about the choice of the person whom he should anoint king, 1 Sam. 9. 15. And so had *David*, 1 Sam 23. 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12. where you find upon his enquiry of God (likely by the *Urim* and *Thummin*) God told him what was his duty as to that expedition, and what would be the event of it.

But now, all are tied up to the ordinary standing rule of the written word and must not expect any such extraordinary revelations from God. The way we now have, to know the will of God concerning us in difficult cases, is, to search and study the scriptures; and where we find no particular rule to guide us in this or that particular case, there we are to apply general rules, and govern ourselves according to the analogy and proportion they bear towards each other.

2. But now it often falls out, that in such doubtful cases we are intangled in our own thoughts, and put to a loss what course to take. We pray with *David*, that God would make his way plain before us, Psal. 5. 8. Afraid

we

we are of displeasing God, and yet doubtful we may do so; whether we resolve this way, or that. And this comes to pass, not only thro' the difficulty of the case, but from our own ignorance and inadvertency; and very frequently from those providences that ly before us, wherein God seems to hint his mind to us, this way or that, and whether we may safely give out ourselves by those intimations of providence, is doubtful to us.

That God doth give men secret hints and intimations of his will by his providence, cannot be doubted; but yet providences, in themselves, are no stable rule of duty, nor sufficient discovery of the will of God. We may say of them, as it is, *Job 23. 8, 9. Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.*

If providence, in itself, be allowed to be a sufficient discovery of God's will to us, then we shall be forced oftentimes to justify and condemn the same cause or person, forasmuch as there is *one event happens to all*, and as it falls out to the good, so to the wicked, *Eccles. 9. 8.* Beside, if providence alone were the rule to judge any action or design by; then a wicked undertaking would cease to be so, if it should succeed well; but sin is sin still, and duty is duty still, whatever the events and issues of either be.

3. The safest way therefore, to make use of providence in such cases, is to consider them as they follow the command or promises of the word, and not singly and separately in themselves. If you search the scriptures with an indifferent and unbiassed spirit, in a doubtful case, pray for counsel and direction from the Lord, attend to the dictates of conscience. And when you have done all, shall find the providences of God falling out agreeably to the dictates of your own conscience, and the best light you can find in the word; you may in such cases make use of it as an encouragement to you in the way of your duty: But the most signal demonstrations of providence are not to be accepted against a scripture-rule; no smiles or successes of providences may, in this case, encourage us to proceed on; and on the other side, no frowns or dis-

cour-

couragements of providence should dishearten us in the way of our duty, how many soever we should encounter therein. Holy Job could not find the meaning of God in his works, yet he would not go back from the commandments of his lips, Job 23. 9. The like resolution you find in David, to proceed in his duty, and cleave to the word, how many stumbling-blocks soever providence should permit to be laid in the way. *I am become* (said he) *like a bottle in the smoke* (not only black, but withered up by troubles) *yet do I not forget thy statutes*, Psal. 119. 83. and again, *ver. 87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.*

Paul, by the direction of the spirit, was engaged to go to Jerusalem, Acts 20. 22. After a clear revelation of the mind of God to him in this matter, how many difficult and discouraging providences befel him in his way? The disciples at Tyre said to him *by the spirit* (tho' in that they followed their own spirits) *that he should not go to Jerusalem*, Acts 21. 4.

Then at Cesarea he met Agabus a prophet, who told him what should befall him when he came thither, chap. 21. 10, 11. All this will not dissuade him; and after all this, how passionately do the brethren beseech him to decline that journey? *ver. 12. 13.* Yet knowing his rule, resolving to be faithful to it, he puts by all, and proceeds in his journey.

Well then, providence, in concurrence with the word, may give some encouragement to us in our way; but no testimony of providence is to be accepted against the word. If scripture and conscience tell you such a way is sinful, you may not venture upon it, how many opportunities and encouragements soever providence may suffer to offer themselves to you, for they are only permitted for your trial, not your encouragement. Take this therefore for a sure rule, that no providence can legitimate, or justify any moral evil, nor will it be a plea before God for any man to say, The providence of God gave me encouragement to do it, tho' the word gave me none. If therefore, in doubtful cases, you would discover God's will, govern yourselves in your search after it by these rules.

I. Get

1. Get the true fear of God upon your hearts, be really afraid of offending him, God will not hide his mind from such a soul, *Psal. 25. 14. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant.*

Study the word more, and the concerns and interests of the world less. The word is a light to your feet, *Psal. 119. 105. i. e. it hath a discovering and directive usefulness as to all duties to be done, and dangers to be avoided; it is the great oracle at which you are to enquire: Treasure up its rules in you hearts, and you will walk safely, Psal. 119. 11. Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

3. Reduce what you know into practice, and you shall know what is your duty to practise, *John 7. 17. If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, Psal. 111. 10. A good understanding have all they that do his Commandments.*

4. Pray for illumination and direction in the way that you should go; beg the Lord to guide you in straits, and that he would not suffer you to fall into sin. This was the holy practice of *Exra*, chap. 8. 21. *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahavah, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.*

5. And this being done, follow providence so far as it agrees with the word, and no farther. There is no use to be made of providence against the word, but in subserviency to it: And there are two excellent uses of providence in subserviency to the word. (1.) Providences, as they follow promises and prayer, are evidences of God's faithfulness in their accomplishment. When *David* languished under a disease, and his enemies began to triumph in the hopes of his downfall; he prays, *Psal. 41. 10. That God would be merciful to him, and raise him up; and by that, he saith, He knew the Lord favoured him, because his enemy did not triumph over him, ver. 11. This providence he looked upon as a token for good, as elsewhere he calls it, Psal. 86. 17. And (2.) Providences give us loud calls to those duties which the command lays upon us, and tells us when we are actually and presently under the obligation of the commands, as to the performance of them. Thus when sad providences befall the Church or ourselves, they*

they ca
the cor
God,
crieth to
the rod,
and wh
ble you
day of
him.
fresh us
God, ac
perity, b
always.
distingui
season:
to us.

HOW
pro
which he h

Two th
1st, Tha
nance of th
rayed for.
2dly, Th
nd hopes r
First, Pr
ose merci
For the
a twofold
ercy to us
mes and se
ho raise up
erely thro
metimes up
ces of enco

they call us to humiliation; and let us know, that then the command upon us to humble ourselves at the feet of God, is in force upon us, *M'cab 6. 9. The Lord's voice crieth to the city; the man of wisdom shall see thy name, hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.* The rod hath a voice, and what doth it speak? Why, now the time is to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. This is the day of trouble, in which God hath bid you to call upon him. And *e contra*, when comfortable providences refresh us, it now informs us, this is the time to rejoice in God, according to the rule, *Eccles. 7. 14. In the day of prosperity be joyful.* These precepts bind *always*, but not to *always*. It is our duty therefore, and our wisdom, to distinguish seasons, and know the proper duties of every season: And providence is an *index*, that points them out to us.

Thus of the first Case.

THE SECOND CASE

HOW may a Christian be supported in waiting upon God whilst providence delays the performance of the mercies to him, for which he hath long pray'd and waited.

Two things are supposed in this Case.

1st, That providence may linger and delay the performance of those mercies to us that we have long waited and prayed for.

2^{dly}, That during the delay and suspension, our hearts and hopes may be very low, and ready to fail.

First, Providence may long delay the performance of those mercies we have prayed, and waited upon God for.

For the right understanding of this, know, that there is a twofold term or season fixed for that performance of mercy to us. One by the Lord our God, in whose hand times and seasons are, *Acts 1. 7.* Another by ourselves, who raise up our own expectations of mercies, sometimes merely thro' the eagerness of our desires after them, and sometimes upon uncertain conjectural grounds and appearances of encouragement that ly before us.

Now, nothing can be more precise, certain and punctual, than is the performance of mercy at the time and season which God hath appointed, how long soever it be, or how many obstacles soever ly in the way of it. There was a time prefixed by God himself for the performance of that promise o' *Israel's* deliverance out of *Egypt*; and it is said, *Exod. 12. 41. At the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out of the land of Egypt.* Compare this with *Acts 7. 17.* and there you have the ground and reason why their deliverance was not, nor could be delayed one day longer, because *the time of the promise was now come.* Promises, like a pregnant woman, must accomplish their appointed months; and when they have so done, providence will midwife the mercies they go big withal into into the world, and not one of them shall miscarry.

But for the seasons which are of our own fixing and appointment, as God is not tied to them, so his providences are not governed by them; and hence are our disappointments. *We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of health and behold trouble, Jer. 8. 15.* And hereupon is it, that we fret at the delays of providence, and suspect the faithfulness of God in their performance. *But his thoughts are not our thoughts, Isa. 55. 8. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, (as some men count slackness) 2 Pet. 3. 9.* It is slackness, if you reckon by your own rule and measure, but it is not so, if you reckon and count it by God's. The Lord doth not compute and reckon his seasons of working by our *arithmetick*. You have both these rules compared, and the ground of our mistake detected in that scripture *Hab. 2. 3. The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

God appoints the time: When that appointed time come, the expected mercies will not fail; but in the meantime, though it tarry (saith the Prophet) *wait for it, for it will not tarry.* Tarry, and not tarry, how shall this be reconciled! The meaning is, it may tarry much beyond your expectation, but not a moment beyond God's appointment.

2dly,
hopes o
discoura
have rec
our own
49. 13,
mise, th
afflicted:
hearts.
they wai
sed them
14. Zion
forgotten n
God hath
mind, he
of us.

So it v
promise,
it, that ne
they are c
providenc
and suffer
despairs to
cludes God
wilt thou for
ere by wa
itive concl
ne day perish
respondenci
elves, and
own hearts
heart are.

1. The in
end and rel
dence that
unchangeabl
intness in t
had believed
appear against
is is wantin
2dly, is rate, wh

2dly, During the delay of providence, the hearts and hopes of the people of God may be very low and much discouraged. This is too plain from what the scriptures have recorded of others, and every one of us may find in our own experiences. We have an instance of this in *Isa.* 49. 13, 14. in the 13. *verse* you have God's faithful promise, that *he will comfort his people, and have mercy upon his afflicted*: Enough one would think to raise and comfort their hearts. But the mercy promised was long in coming, they waited from year to year, and still the burden pressed them; and was not removed. And therefore, *verse* 14. *Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me*, q. d. It's in vain to look for such a mercy, God hath no regard to us, we are out of his heart and mind, he neither cares for us, nor minds what becomes of us.

So it was with *David*, after God had made him such a promise, and in the time thereof so faithfully performed it, that never was mercy better secured to any man; for they are called, *the sure mercies of David*, *Isa.* 55. 3. yet providence delayed the accomplishment of them so long, and suffered such difficulties to interveen, that he even despaired to see the accomplishment of them, but even concludes God had forgotten him too, *Psal.* 13. 1. *How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever?* And what he speaks here by way of question, he elsewhere turns it into a positive conclusion, *Psal.* 119. 11. *All men are liars; I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*. And the causes of these despondencies, and sinkings of heart are partly from our selves, and partly from Satan. If we duly examine our own hearts about it, we shall find that these sinkings of heart are.

1. The immediate effects of unbelief. We do not depend and rely upon the word with that full trust and confidence that is due to the infallible word of a faithful and unchangeable God. You may see the ground of this unbelief in that scripture, *Psal.* 27. 13. *I had fainted unless thou had believed*. Faith is the only cordial that relieves the heart against these faintings and despondencies. Where faith is wanting, or is weak, no wonder our hearts sink at this rate, when discouragements are before us.

2. Our judging and measuring things by the rules of sense, this is a great cause of our discouragements. We conclude, According to the appearances of things will be their issues. If *Abraham* had done so, in that great trial of his faith, he had certainly lost his footing; *but against hope* (i. e. against natural probability) *he believed in hope, giving glory to God*; Rom. 4. 18. If *Paul* had done so, he had fainted under his trials, 2 Cor. 4. 16. 18. *We faint not* (saith he) *whilst we look not at the things that are seen*, q. d. That which keeps up our spirits, is our looking off from things present and visible, and measuring all by another rule, viz. the power and fidelity of God firmly engaged in the promises.

3. In all these things *Satan* manages a design upon us. Hence he takes occasion to suggest hard thoughts of God, and to beat off our souls from all confidence in him, and expectations from him. He is the great make-bate betwixt God and the saints. He reports the difficulties and fears that are in our way with advantage, and labours to weaken our hands, and discourage our hearts in waiting upon God. And these suggestions gain the more credit with us, because they are confirm'd and attested by sense and feeling.

But here is a desperate design carrying on under very plausible pretences against our souls. It concerns us to be watchful now, and maintain our faith and hope in God. Now blessed is he that can resign all to God, and quietly wait for his salvation. To assist the soul in this difficulty, I shall offer some farther help beside what hath been formerly given under the *first caution*, in the following considerations.

First Consideration.

Tho' Providence do not yet perform the mercies you wait for, yet you have no ground to entertain hard thoughts of God; for it is possible God never gave you any ground for your expectation of these things from him. It may be you have no promise to bottom your hope upon; and if so, why shall God be suspected and dishonoured by you in a case wherein his truth and faithful

ness w
our ou
prosper
fort re
why n
promis
prosper
things
he hat
There
withold
vidence
11. hat
walk up
you hav
non-per
heart, r
many fla
God, bo
ly in wi
all that
the objec
external
dom and
they are
mercies,
conducib
times and
God n
outward
ed, we c
pect rest
world? I
and at eas
ten told u
33. and i
kingdom, A
promise to
ply our re
and needy

ness was never engaged for you? If we were crossed in our outward concerns, and see our expectations of prosperity dashed; if we see such or such an outward comfort removed, from which we promised ourselves much; why must God be accused for this? These things you promised yourselves; but where did God promise you prosperity, and the continuance of those comfortable things to you? Produce his promise, and shew wherein he hath broken it. It is not enough for you to say, There are general promises in the scripture, that God will withhold no good thing, and these are good things which providence withholds from you; for that promise, *Psal. 84. 11.* hath its limitations, it is expressly limited to such as walk uprightly; and it concerns you to examine whether you have done so, before you quarrel with providence for non-performance of it. Ah friend! search thine own heart, reflect upon thine own ways; seest thou not so many flaws in thine integrity, so many turnings aside from God, both in heart and life, that may justify God, not only in withholding what thou lookest for, but in removing all that thou enjoyest? And beside this limitation as to the object, it is limited (as all other promises relating to externals are) in the matter or things promised by the wisdom and will of God, which is the only rule by which they are measured out to men in this world; *i. e.* such mercies, in such proportions, as he sees needful and most conducive to your good; and these given out in such times and seasons are of his own appointment, not yours.

God never came under an absolute unlimited tye for outward comforts to any of us; and if we be disappointed, we can blame none but ourselves. Who bid us expect rest, ease, delight, and things of this kind in this world? He hath never told us, we shall be rich, healthy, and at ease in our habitations; but on the contrary, he hath often told us, we must expect troubles in the world, *John 16. 33.* and that *through many tribulations we must enter into his kingdom, Acts 14. 22.* All that he stands bound to us by promise for, is to be with us in trouble, *Psal. 91. 15.* to supply our real and absolute need, *Isa. 41. 17.* When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth

for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them; and to sanctify all these providences to our good at last, Rom. 8. 28, All things shall work together for good to them that love God. And as to all these things—not one tittle ever did, or shall fail.

But if you say, you have long waited upon God for spiritual mercies to your souls according to the promise, and still those mercies are deferred, and your eyes fail whilst you look for them; I would desire you seriously to consider of what kind those spiritual mercies are, for which you have so long waited upon God. Spiritual mercies are of two sorts; such as belong to the *essence*, the very being of the new creature, without which it must fail; or to its *well being*, and the comfort of the inner man; without which you cannot live so cheerfully as you would. The mercies of the former kind are absolutely necessary, and therefore put into absolutely promises, as you see, Jer. 32. 40. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.* But for the rest they are dispensed to us in such measures, and at such seasons, as the Lord sees fit, and many of his own people live for a long time without them. The donation and continuation of the Spirit, to quicken, sanctify and unite us with Christ is necessary, but his joys and comforts are not so. A child of light may walk in darkness, Isa. 50. 10. He lives by faith, and not by feeling

Third Consideration.

You complain, providence delays to perform to you the mercies you have prayed and waited for; but have you right ends in your desires after these mercies? It may be that's the cause you ask and receive not, James 4. 3. The want of a good aim, is the reason why we want good success in in our prayers. It may be we pray for prosperity, and our end is to please the flesh; we look no higher

than the
beg and
fiction,
pared f
us, and
Cerra
condem
of God.

You
will br
bout it
fore yo
is the th
wills, i
cannot
was ma
and to
131. 2.
must no

Your
and why
Psal. 6
judgment
that are
than to
why the

Will
for me
to a do
missive
do not

than the pleasure and accommodation of the flesh; we beg and wait for deliverance from such a trouble and affliction, not that we might be the more expedite and prepared for obedience, but freed from what is grievous to us, and destroys our pleasure in the world.

Certainly if it be so, you have more need to judge and condemn yourselves, than to censure and suspect the care of God.

Fourth Consideration.

You wait for good, and it comes not; but is your will brought to a due submission to the will of God about it? Certainly, God will have you come to this before you enjoy your desires. Enjoyment of your desires is the thing that will please you, but resignation of your wills, is that which is pleasing to God: If your hearts cannot come to this, mercies cannot come to you. *David* was made to wait long for the mercy promised him, yea, and to be content without it before he enjoyed it. *Psal.* 131. 2. he was brought to be *as a weaned child*, and so must not you.

Fifth Consideration.

Your betters have waited long upon God for mercy, and why should not you? *David* waited till his eyes failed, *Psal.* 69. 3. The church waited for him in the way of his judgments, *Isa.* 26. 8. Are you better than all the saints that are gone before you? Is God more obliged to you, than to all his people? They have quietly waited, and why should you?

Sixth Consideration.

Will you lose any thing by patient waiting upon God for mercies? Certainly, not at all; yea, it will turn to a double advantage to you to continue in a quiet submissive waiting posture upon God: For, (1.) Tho' you do not yet enjoy the good you wait for, yet all this while

you are exercising your grace; and it is more excellent to act grace, than to enjoy comfort. All this while the Lord is training you up in the exercise of faith and patience, and bending your wills in submission to himself; and what do you lose by that? Yea, and (2.) Whenever the desired mercy comes, it will be so much the sweeter to you: For, look how much faith and prayer hath been employed to produce it, how many wrestlings have you had with God for it, so many more degrees sweetness of you will find in it, when it comes. O therefore, faint not, how long soever God delay you!

Seventh Consideration.

Are not those mercies you expect from God worth the waiting upon? If not, it is your folly to be troubled at the want of them: If they be, why don't you continue waiting? Is it not all that God expects from you for the mercies he bestows upon you, that you wait upon him for them? You know, you have not deserved the least of them at his hands: You expect them not as a recompence, but a free favour; and if so, then certainly the least you can do, is to wait upon his pleasure for them.

Eighth Consideration.

Consider how many promises are made in the word to waiting souls. One scripture calls them *blessed that wait for him*, Isa. 30. 18. Another tells us, *none that wait for him shall be ashamed*, Psal. 25. 3. i. e. they shall not be finally disappointed, but at last be partakers of their hopes. A third scripture tells us, *They that wait for the Lord, shall renew their strength*, Isa. 40. 31. a promise you had need to make use of in such a fainting time with many more of like nature; and shall we faint at this rate in the midst of so many cordials as are prepared to revive us in these promises?

How
comply
ments
your r
reason
your co
God h
long?

for ever

shall I t

How lon

should

how lo

We ha

unbelief

lieve me

him cry

4. 14.

cry, Ho

8. 5.

for you

mercies

This
your w
in itself
the wa
your me
submissi

H O

Ninth Consideration.

How long hath God waited upon you, when you will comply with his commands, come up to your engagements and promises? You have made God wait long for your reformation and obedience? and therefore have no reason to think it much, if God make you wait long for your consolation. We have our *how longs*, and hath not God his—We cry, *Psal. 6. 3. But thou, O Lord, how long? Psal. 13. 1, 2. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?* But surely we should nor think these things long, when we consider, how long the Lord hath exercised his patience about us. We have made him say, *How long, how long? Our unbelief hath made him cry, How long will it be ere they believe me? Numb. 14. 11. Our corrupt hearts have made him cry, How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee, Jer. 4. 14. Our impure natures and ways have made him cry, How long will it be ere they attain to innocency? Hosca 8. 5. If God wait upon you with so much patience for your duties, well may you wait upon him for his mercies.*

Tenth Consideration.

This impatience and infidelity of yours, expressed in your weariness to wait any longer, as it is a great evil in itself, so very probably it is that evil which obstructs the way of your expected mercies: You might have your mercies sooner, if your spirits were quieter and more submissive.

And thus of the second Case.

THE THIRD CASE.

HOW may a Christian discern when a Providence is sanctified, and comes from the love of God to him?

H 5

There

There are two sorts or kinds of providences versant about men in this world, the issues and events of which are vastly different, yea, contrary to each other.

1st, To some all providences are overruled and ordered for good, according to that blessed promise, *Rom. 8. 28.* not only things that are good in themselves, as ordinances, duties and mercies; but things that are evil in themselves, as temptations, afflictions, and even their sins and corruptions shall turn in the issue to their advantage and benefit. For tho' sin be so intrinsically and formally evil in its own nature, that in itself it be not capable of sanctification; yet out of this worst of evils God can work good to his people; and tho' he never make sin the instrument of good; yet his providence may make it the occasion of good to his people; so that spiritual benefits may, by the wise overruling of providence, be occasioned to the people of God by it.

And so for afflictions of all kinds, the greatest and sorrest of them; they do work, in the influence of providence, a great deal of good to the saints, and that not only as the occasions, but as the instruments and means of it, *Isa. 27. 9.* *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged,* i. e. by the instrumentality of this sanctified affliction.

2^{dly}, To others nothing is sanctified either as an instrument or occasion of any spiritual good; but as the worst things are ordered to the benefit of the saints, so the best things wicked men enjoy do them no good. Their prayers are turned into sin, *Psal. 109. 7.* — The ordinances are the savour of death, *2 Cor. 2. 16* — The grace of God turned into wantonness, *Jude ver. 4.* — Christ himself a rock of offence, *1 Pet 2. 8.* — Their table a snare, *Psal. 69. 22.* — Their prosperity their ruin, *Prov. 1. 32* — As persons are, so things work for good or evil, *Tit. 1. 15* *To the pure all thing are pure, but to them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.*

Seeing therefore the events of providence fall out so opposite to each other upon the godly, and ungodly; every thing furthering the eternal good of the one, and the ruin of the other; it cannot but be acknowledged a most important case in which every soul is deeply concerned, whether

the

the p
or no

For
sary c
be use

And
from
sanctifi
things
red by
cannot
things
videnc
that C
dences
have
a weak
a part
tify ou
ments
us.

And
know
afflict
or fix
whom
people
vain se
in plea

Out
man's
tempor
the righ

Seco
sidered
manner
they p
and by
provide
yet the
discern

the providences under which he is, be sanctified to him or no?

For the clearing of which I shall premise two necessary considerations, and then subjoin the rules which will be useful for the determination of the question.

And *first*, Let it be considered, that we cannot know from the matter of the things before us, whether they be sanctified or un sanctified to us; for so consider'd, *All things come alike to all; and no man knoweth either love or hatred by all the things that are before him*, Eccl. 9. 1, 2. We cannot understand the mind and heart of God, by the things he dispenseth with his hand. If prosperous providences befall us, we cannot say, Herein is a sure sign that God loves me; for who have more of those providences than the people of his wrath? *Psal. 73. 7. They have more than their hearts can wish.* Sure, that must be a weak evidence for heaven, which accompanies so great a part of the world to hell. By these things we may testify our love to God; but from ten thousand such enjoyments we cannot get any solid assurance of his love to us.

And from adverse afflictive providences we cannot know his hatred. If afflictions, great afflictions, many afflictions, long continued afflictions should set a brand or fix a character of God's hatred upon the persons on whom they fall; where then shall we find any of God's people in the world? We must then seek out the proud vain sensual wantons of the world, who spend their days in pleasure, and say, these are the men whom God loves;

Outward things are promiscuously dispensed, and no man's spiritual estate is discernable by the view of his temporal. When God draws the sword, it may cut off *the righteous* as well as *the wicked*, Ezek 21. 3.

Secondly, Tho' the providences of God, materially considered, afford no evidence of God's love to us, yet the manner in which they befall us, and the effects and fruits they produce in us, do distinguish them very manifestly; and by them we may discern whether they be sanctified providences, and fruits of the love of God, or not. But yet these effects and fruits of providences, by which we may discern their nature, do not always presently appear; but

time

time must be allowed for the soul's exercise under them. As it is *Heb. 12. 11.* *Now, no affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

The benefit of providence is discerned as that of a medicine is; for the present it grips and makes the stomach sick and loathing, but afterwards we find the benefit of it in our recovery of health and cheerfulness. Now, the providences of God being some of them comfortable, and others sad and grievous to nature, and the way to discern the sanctification and blessing of them, being by the manner in which they come, and their operations upon our spirits; I shall consider the case as it respects both sorts of providences, and shew you what effects of our troubles or comforts will speak them to be sanctified and blessed to us.

And first, For sad and afflictive providences, in what kind or degree soever they befall us, we may warrantably conclude, they are blessings to us, and come from the love of God, when,

1. They come in a proper season; when we have need of them, either to prevent some sin we are falling into, or recover us out of a remiss, supine, and careless frame of spirit into which we are already fallen, *1 Pet 1. 6.* *If need be, ye are in heaviness.* Certainly, it is a good sign that God designs your good by those troubles, which are so fitted and wisely ordered to catch the opportunity. If you see the husband man lopping a tree in the proper season, it argues he aims at the fruitfulness and flourishing of it; but to do the same thing at midsummer speaks no regard to it, yea, his design to destroy it.

2. When they are fitted both for quality and degree to work properly upon our most predominant corruptions, then they look like sanctified strokes. The wisdom of God is much seen in the choice of his rods. It is not any kind of trouble that will work upon and purge every sin; but when God chuses for us such afflictions as, like phylick, are appropriated to the disease the soul labours under, this speaks divine care and love. Thus we may observe

observ
comfo
light
from
fort.
us, an
but ne
bles,
dom
grace,
debate
wind.
and m
potion
to his
words
be purge

3. I
when
God.
but th
Wick
conten
Rev 1
ed the
godly.
and fa
give g
unto th
Wherefo
of his s
our an

4. I
when t
and lif
than th
ers, th
purge c
35. it
compar

observe, it is usual with God to smite us in those very comforts which stole away too much of the love and delight of our souls from God; to cross us in these things from which we raised up too great expectations of comfort. These providences speak the jealousy of God over us, and his care to prevent far worse evils by these sad but needful strokes. And so for the degrees of our troubles, sanctified strokes are ordinarily fitted by the wisdom of God to the strength and ability of our inherent grace, *Isa. 27. 8. In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate with it: He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.* It is an allusion to a physician, who exactly weighs and measures all the ingredients which he mingles in a potion for his sick patient, that it may be proportionate to his strength, and no more; and so much the next words intimate, *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.*

3. It is a good sign our troubles are sanctified to us, when they turn our hearts against sin, and not against God. There be few great afflictions which befall men, but they make them quarrelsome and discontented. Wicked men quarrel with God, and are filled with discontent against him. So the scripture describes them, *Rev 16 9. They were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues.* But godly men, to whom afflictions are sanctified, justify God, and fall out with sin; they condemn themselves, and give glory to God, *Dan. 9. 7. O Lord, righteousness be longeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, &c.* And *Lam 3. 39. Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* Happy afflictions, which make the soul fall out and quarrel only with sin!

4. It is a sure sign afflicting providences are sanctified, when they purge the heart from sin, and leave both heart and life more pure, heavenly, mortified, and humble, than they found them. Sanctified afflictions are cleansers, they pull down the pride, refine the earthliness, and purge out the vanity of the spirit. So you read, *Dan. 11. 35. it purifies and makes their souls white: Hence it is compared to a furnace which separates the dross from the*

he pure metal, *Iſa.* 48. 10. *Behold I have refined thee, but not with ſilver: I have choſen thee in the furnace of affliction.* But for wicked men, let them be never ſo long in the furnace, they loſe no dross, *Ezek.* 24. 6. How many Chriſtians can bear witneſs to this truth! After ſome ſharp affliction hath been upon them, how is the earthlineſs of their hearts purged! they ſee no beauty, taſte no more reliſh in the world than in the white of an egg. Oh! how ſerious, humble, and heavenly are they, till the impreſſions made upon them by afflictions be worn off, and their deceitful luſts have again entangled them! And this is the reaſon why we are ſo often under the diſcipline of the rod. "Let a Chriſtian (*ſaith a late writer*) be but two or three years without an affliction, and he is almoſt good for nothing: He cannot pray, nor meditate, nor diſcourſe at that rate he was wont to do; but when a new affliction comes, now he can find his tongue, and come to his knees again, and live at another rate."

5. It is a good ſign afflictive providences are ſanctified to us, when we draw near to God under them, and *turn to him that ſmites us*. A wicked man under affliction *revolts more and more*. *Iſa.* 1. 5. *turns not to him that ſmites him*, *Iſa.* 9. 13. but grows worſe than before; formality is turned into ſtupidity and dedolency. — But if God afflict his own people with a ſanctified rod, it awakens them to a more earneſt ſeeking of God; it makes them pray more frequently, ſpiritually, and fervently than ever. When *Paul* was buffered by *Satan*, he *beſought the Lord thrice*, *2 Cor.* 12. 8.

6. We may conclude our afflictions to be ſanctified, and to come from the love of God to us, when they do not alienate our hearts from God, but inflame our love to him. This is a ſure rule, Whatever ends in the increaſe of our love to God, proceeds from the love of God to us. A wicked man finds his heart riſing againſt God when he ſmites him, but a gracious heart cleaves the cloſer to him: He can love as well as juſtify an afflictive God. *All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falſly in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our ſteps declined from thy way: Though thou haſt ſore*

broken

broken
of deſt
count
great
covered
ſlate o
not ba
love to
ons as

Laſt
vine to
12. Bl
eſt him
they r
accom
ture, r
en. M
his cor
man to
proſpe
how i
can fin
a bleſ
man t
humbl

In r
ther b
pleaſan
ſperity
Here r
provid
this m
ſorts o

1. I
which
wicked
whom t

broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death Psal. 44. 17, 18, 19 Here you have a true account of the temper and frame of a gracious soul under greatest afflictions. To be broken in the place of dragons, and covered with the shadow of death imports the most dismal state of affliction: Yet even then a gracious heart turns not back; i. e. doth not for all this abate one drachm of love to God; God is as good and dear to him in afflictions as ever.

Lastly, We may call our afflictions sanctified, when divine teachings accompany them to our souls; Psal. 94. 12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law. Sanctified afflictions are eye-salve, they teach us sensibly and effectually, when the Spirit accompanies them, the evil of sin, the vanity of the creature, the necessity of securing things that cannot be shaken. Never doth a Christian take a truer measure both of his corruptions and graces, than under the rod. Now a man sees that filthiness that hath been long contracting in prosperity, what interest the creature hath in the heart, how little faith, patience, resignation, and self-denial we can find, when God calls us to the exercise of them. O it is a blessed sign, that trouble is sanctified, that makes a man thus turn in upon his own heart, search it, and humble himself before the Lord for the evils of it.

In the next place, let us take into consideration the other branch of providences which are comfortable and pleasant. Sometimes it shines upon us in successes, prosperity, and the gratification of the desires of our hearts. Here the question will be, How the sanctification of these providences may be discovered to us? For resolution in this manner, I shall, for clearness sake, lay down two sorts of rules; one negative, the other positive.

First Negative.

1. It is a sign, that comfort is not sanctified to us, which comes not (ordinarily) in the way of prayer. The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked thro' the pride of his

conscience will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts. Psal. 10. 3, 4. Here you see, providence may not give all men their hearts desire, and yet they never once open their desires to God in prayer about it. But then those gifts of providence are only such as are bestowed on the worst of men, and are not the fruits of love.

2. Whatever success, prosperity or comfort, men acquire by sinful mediums, and indirect courses, are not sanctified mercies to them. This is not the method in which those mercies are bestowed: *Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right*, Prov. 16. 8. better upon this account, that it comes in God's way, and with his blessing, which never follows the way of sin. God hath cursed the ways of sin, and no blessing can follow them.

3. Whatever prosperity and success makes men forget God, and cast off the care of duty, is not sanctified to them. It is unsanctified prosperity which lulls men asleep into a deep oblivion of God, Deut. 32. 13, 14. 15, 18. *He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with the fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat, and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grapes. But Jesurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness: Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock his salvation. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. Rare fumant scilicibus aræ.*

4. When prosperity is abused to sensuality, and merely serves as fuel to main ain fleshly lusts, it is not sanctified. See Job 21. 11, 12, 13. *They sing forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and karp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.*

5. It is a sign that prosperity is not sanctified to men, when it swells the heart with pride and self-conceitedness, Dan. 4. 29, 30. *At the end of twelve-months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake and*

said,

*said, I
of the k
my maj
6. I
them o
gent, o
on, see
a land
will com
7. N
wholly
ments,
fins.
themselv
and the c
viol, an
They dri
ointments*

*1. T
tified to
God in
of them
least of all
2. Sa
ons again
restrain
shun sin.
3. Th
of his me
4. Th
the soul
score, H
riches thu
recompence
5. Nor
or miseri
23.
6. It is*

said, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*

6. That success is not sanctified to men, which takes them off from their duty, and makes them wholly negligent, or very much indisposed to it, *Jer. 2. 31. O generation, see the word of the Lord; have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness? Wherefore say many people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee?*

7. Nor can we think that prosperity sanctified, which wholly swallows up the souls of men in their own enjoyments, and makes them regardless of publick miseries or sins. *Amos 6. 4, 5, 6. They ly upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall. They chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick like David. They drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.*

But then *Positively.*

1. Those mercies and comforts are undoubtedly sanctified to men, which humble their souls kindly before God in the sense of their own vileness, and unworthiness of them, *Gen. 32. 10. And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, &c.*

2. Sanctified mercies are commonly turned into cautions against sin, *Exra 9. 13. they are so many bands of restraint upon the soul that hath them, to make them shun sin.*

3. They will engage a man's heart in love to the God of his mercies, *Psal. 18. 1. compared with the title.*

4. They never satisfy a man as his portion, nor will the soul accept all the prosperity in the world upon that score, *Heb 11. 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: For he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

5. Nor do they make men regardless of publick sins or miseries, *Nehem. 2. 1, 2, 3. compared with Acts 7.*

6. It is a sure sign that mercies are sanctified, when they

they make the soul more expedite and enlarged for God in duty, 2 Chron. 17. 5, 6. *Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand, and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents, and he had riches and honour in abundance. And his heart was lift up in the ways of the Lord, &c.*

7. To conclude; That which is obtained by prayer, and returned to God again in due praise, carries its own testimonials with it, that it came from the love God, and is a sanctified mercy to the soul.

And so much of this third Case.

THE FOURTH CASE.

HOW may we attain unto an evenness and steadiness of spirit under the changes, and contrary aspects of providence upon us?

Three things are supposed in this case.

1. That providence hath various and contrary aspects upon the people of God.
2. That it is a common thing with them, to experience great disorders of spirit under those changes of providence.
3. That these disorders may be (at least in a great measure) prevented by the due use and application of those rules and helps that God hath given us in such cases.

1st, That providence hath various, yea, contrary aspects upon the people of God, is a case so plain, that it needs no more than the mentioning, to let it in to all our understandings. Which of all the people of God have not felt this truth? Providence rings the changes all the world over. *He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the nations, and straitneth them again, Job 12. 23. The same it doth with persons, Psal. 102. 10. Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down* See what a sad alteration providence made upon the church, Lam. 1. 1, 12. *How doth the city sit solitary that was so full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and*

prince
nothin
any jo
ed me
stance
pared
Naom
that
her, M
2dly
great
tenle
consti
videnc
and r
holy
ness a
videnc
pains
and d
And v
ous co
diseov
mon st
in an e
30. 6,
kideft
can say
how to
to be fu
Ppilir.
poverty
stock o
3dly,
ders o
these d
by the
hath gi

princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary? Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger. And how great an instance was Job of this truth, Job 29 *per totum* and 30 compared? How many thousands have complained with Naomi whose condition hath been so strangely altered, that others have said, as the people of Bethlehem did of her, *Is this Naomi?* Ruth 1. 19, 20, 21.

2dly, These vicissitudes of providence commonly cause great disorders of spirit in the best men. Look as an intense heat and cold try the strength and soundness of the constitution of our bodies, so the alterations made by providence upon our conditions try the strength of our graces, and too often discover the weakness and corruptions of holy men. Hezekiah was a good man; but yet his weakness and corruption was bewrayed by the alterations providence made upon his conditions. When sickness and pains summoned him to the grave, what bitter complaints and despondencies are recorded, in *Isa* 38. *per totum*? And when providence lifted him up again into a prosperous condition, what ostentation and vain glory did he discover? *Isa* 39. 2. David had more than a common stock of inherent grace, yet not enough to keep him in an equal temper of spirit under great alterations, *Psal.* 30. 6, 7. *In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved; thou hidest thy face, and I was troubled.* It is not every man can say with Paul, *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,* *Ppilip.* 4. 12. He is truly rich in grace, whose riches or poverty neither hinders the acting, nor impoverisheth the stock of his graces.

3dly, Tho' the best of men are subject to such disorders of heart under the changes of providence; yet these disorders may, in a great measure, be prevented by the due application of such rules and helps as God hath given us in such cases.

Now,

Now, these helps are suited to a threefold aspect of providence upon us:

1. Comfortable.
2. Calamitous.
3. Doubtful.

To all which I shall speak particularly and briefly.

QUESTION I.

How may we attain to an evenness and steadiness of heart under the comfortable aspects of providence upon us?

Under providences of this kind, the great danger is, lest the heart be lifted up with pride and vanity, and fall into a drowsy and remiss temper. To prevent this, we had need urge humbling and awaking considerations upon our own hearts; such are these that follow.

First Consideration, These gifts of providence are common to the worst of men, and are no special distinguishing fruits of God's love. The vilest of men have been filled even to satiety with these things, *Psal. 73. 7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: They have more than their hearts could wish.*

Second Consideration, Think how unstable and changeable all these things are. What you glory in to-day, may be none of yours to-morrow, *Prov. 23. 5. Riches make themselves wings, they flee away as an eagle towards heaven.* As the wings of a fowl grow out of the substance of the body, so the cause of the creatures transitoriness, is in itself: It is subjected to vanity, and that vanity, like wings, carries it away: They are but fading flowers, *James 1. 10.*

Third Consideration, The change of providences is never nearer to the people of God, than when their hearts are lifted up, or grown secure by prosperity. Doth *Hezekiah* glory in his treasures? The next news he hears, is of an impoverishing providence at hand, *Isa. 39. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.* Others may be left to perish in un sanctified prosperity, but you shall not.

Four
nality
heart
little
these
such
matter

Fifth
conditi
with
your
So Go
thee in
to their
heart
Lord:
when
strange
God's
from hi

Upon
hearts
ous and
Here
despond
cross
heart in

First C
are of
without
frosts, an
providen
without
them; h
his grace

Second
ple of Go
shall separ

Fourth Consideration, This is a great discovery of the carnality and corruption that is in thy heart: It argues an heart little set upon God, little mortified to the world, little acquainted with the vanity and ensnaring nature of these things. O you know not what hearts you have, till such providences try them! And is not such a discovery matter of deep humiliation?

Fifth Consideration, Was it not better with you in a low condition, than it is now? Reflect and compare state with state, and time with time. How is the frame of your hearts altered with the alteration of your condition? So God complains of Israel, Hosea 13. 5, 6. *I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought: According to their pasture so were they filled: They were filled, and their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me, saith the Lord: q. d.* You and I were better acquainted formerly, when you were in a low condition; prosperity hath estranged you, and altered the case. How sad is it, that God's mercies should be the occasion of estrangement from him?

QUESTION II.

Upon the other side, it is worth considering how our hearts may be established and kept steady under calamitous and adverse providences.

Here we are in equal danger of the other extreme, *viz.* despondency and sinking under the frowns and strokes of cross providences. Now, to support and establish the heart in this case, take three helps.

First Consideration, Consider, That afflictive providences are of great use to the people of God, they cannot live without them; The earth doth not more need chastning frosts, and mellowing snows, than our hearts do nipping providences. Let the best Christian be but a few years without them, and he will be sensible of the need of them; he will find a sad remission and declining upon all his graces.

Second Consideration, No stroke of calamity upon the people of God, can separate them from Christ: Rom. 8. 35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation?*
 &c.

&c. There was a time when *Job* could call nothing in this world, but trouble, his own : He could not say, my estate, my honour, my health, my children ; for all these were gone ; yet then he could say, *my Redeemer*, *Job* 19. 25. Well then, there is no cause to sink, whilst interest in Christ remains sure to us.

Third Consideration, All your calamities will have an end shortly. The longest day of the saints troubles have an end ; and then no more troubles for ever. The troubles of the wicked will be to eternity ; but you *shall suffer but a while*, 1 *Per.* 5. 10. If a thousand troubles be appointed for you, they will come to one at last, and after that no more : Yea, and tho' our troubles be *but for a moment*, yet they *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Let that support your hearts under all your sufferings.

QUESTION. III.

Lastly, Let us consider, what may be useful to support and quiet our hearts under doubtful providences, when our dear concernments hang in a doubtful suspense before us, and we know not which way the providence of God will cast and determine them.

Now the best hearts are apt to grow solicitous and pensive, distracted with thoughtfulness about the event and issue. To relieve and settle us in this case, the following considerations are very useful.

First Consideration, Let us consider the vanity and inutility of such a solicitude, *Matth.* 6. 27. *Which of you (saith our Lord) by taking thought can add one cubit ?* We may break our peace, and waste our spirits, but not alter the case. We cannot turn God out of his way, *Job* 23. 13. *He is in one mind*. We may by struggling against God increase, but not avoid or lighten, our troubles.

Second Consideration, How often do we afflict and torment ourselves by our own unquiet thoughts, when there is no real cause or ground for so doing ? *Isa.* 51. 13. —

And hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy, and where is the fury of the oppressor ? O ! what abundance of disquiet and trouble

might

might
of pro
more

Thin
it, tha
fairs

Father
mission
have n

John
withou
to you

Four
to all
that th

and syl
in the
concer

two gr
steady

and thi
and ho
found

that ou
fidence

Not on
rest are
dence o

Fifth
have th
mit all

devolve
thy work

By wor
business
tured.

with hi
have by
tranquil
there of
not found

might we prevent, by waiting quietly till we see the issues of providence, and not bringing, as we do, the evils of the morrow upon the day

Third Consideration, How great a ground of quietness is it, that the whole dispose and management of all our affairs and concerns is in the hand of our own God and Father? No creature can touch us without his commission or permission. *I know* (saith Christ) *thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above;* John 19. 11. Neither men nor devils can act any thing without God's leave; and be sure, he will sign no order to your prejudice.

Fourth Consideration, How great satisfaction must it be to all that believe the divine authority of the scripture, that the faithfulness of God stands engaged for every line and syllable found therein? And how many blessed lines in the Bible may we mark, that respect even our outward concerns, and the happy issue of them all? Upon these two grounds, *viz.* that our outward concerns, with their steady direction to a blessed end, is found in the word; and this word being of divine authority, the faithfulness and honour of God stands good for every title that is found there. I say, these are grounds of such stability, that our minds may repose with greatest security and confidence upon them, even in the cloudiest day of trouble. Not only your eternal salvation, but your temporal interest are there secured. Be quieted therefore in the confidence of a blessed issue.

Fifth Consideration, How great and sure an expedient have the saints ever found it to their own peace, to commit all doubtful issues of providence to their Lord, and devolve all their cares upon him, *Prov. 16. 3. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.* By works he means any doubtful, intricate, perplexing business, about which our thoughts are rack'd and tortured. Roll all these upon the Lord by faith, leave them with him, and the present immediate benefit you shall have by it (besides the comfort in the last issue) shall be tranquillity and peace in your thoughts. And who is there of any standing or experience in religion that hath not found it so.

THE FIFTH CASE.

HOW may a Christian work his heart into a resigning frame unto the will of God; when sad providences approach him, and presage great troubles and afflictions coming on towards him.

For the right stating and resolving of this important case. It will be needful to shew. (1.) What is not included and intended in the question. (2.) What it doth suppose and include in it. And *Lastly*, What helps and directions are necessary for the due performance of this great and difficult duty.

First, *Negatively*.

As to the first, it must be premised, that the question doth not suppose the heart or will of a Christian to be at his own command and dispose in this matter: We cannot resign it, and subject it to the will of God whenever we desire so to do: The duty indeed is ours, but the power by which alone we perform it, is God's: We act as we are acted by the Spirit. It is with our hearts, as with meteors hanging in the air, by the influence of the sun; while that continues, they abide above, but when it fails they fall to the earth: We can do this, and all things else be they never so difficult, *through Christ that strengthens us*, Ppilip. 4. 13. But *without him we can do nothing*, 15. 5. He doth not say, without me ye can do but little, or without me ye can do nothing but with great difficulty; but without me ye can do nothing at all. And every Christian hath a witness in his own breast to attest this truth: For there are cases frequently occurring in the methods of providence, in which, notwithstanding all their prayers and desires, all their reasonings and strivings, they cannot quiet their hearts fully in the dispose and will of God; but on the contrary do find all their endeavours in this matter, to be but as the rolling of a returning stone against the hill: Till God

say

say to the heart be still, and to the will give up, nothing can be done.

Secondly, Affirmatively.

Next, Let us consider what this case doth suppose, and include in it, and we shall find.

1. That it supposeth the people of God to have a foresight of troubles and distresses approaching and drawing near to them: I confess it is not always so, for many of our afflictions, as well as comforts, come by way of surprizals upon us. But oft times we have forewarnings of troubles both publick and personal, before we feel them; As the weather may be discerned by the face of the sky when we see a morning sky red and lowering, this is a natural sign of a foul and rainy day, *Mat. 16. 3.* and there are as certain signs of the times, whereby we may discern when trouble is near, even at the door: And these forewarnings are given by the Lord to awaken us to our duties, by which they may either be prevented, *Zeph. 2. 1, 2.* or sanctified and sweetned to us when they come. These signs and notices of approaching troubles are gathered partly from the observation and collation of parallel scripture cases and examples, God generally holding one tenor and steady course in the administrations of his providences in all ages, *1 Cor. x. 9.* partly from reflections Christians make upon the frames and tempers of their own hearts, which greatly need awakning, humbling and purging providences. For, let a Christain be a but few years or months without a rod, and how formal, earthly, dead and vain, will his heart grow? And such a temper prefigures affliction to them that are beloved of the Lord, as really as the giving or sweating of the stones doth rain. *Lastly,* The ordering and disposing of the next causes into a posture and preparation for our trouble, plainly premonisheth that trouble is at the door. Thus when the symptoms of sickness begin to appear upon our own bodies, the wife of our bosom, or our children that are as our own souls, providence herein awakens our expectations of death and doleful separations. So, when enemies combine together, and plot the ruin of our liberties, estates, or lives, and God seemeth to loose the bridle of restraint upon their necks, now we cannot but be alarmed with the near approach of troubles, especially when at the

same time our conscience shall reflect upon the abuse and and non-improvement of these our threatned comforts.

2. The case before us supposeth, that these promitions and fore-runners of affliction, do usually very much disturb the order and break the peace of our souls, they put the mind under great discomposure, the thoughts under much distractions, and the affections into tumults and rebellion.

Ah how unwilling are we to surrender to the Lord the loan which he lent us! To be disquieted by troubles when at ease in our enjoyments! How unwelcome are the messenger of affliction to the best men! We are ready to say to them as the widow to *Elijah*, *What have I to do with thee, O man (O messenger) of God, art thou come unto me to call my sons to remembrance, and to slay my son*, 1 Kings 17. 18. And this ariseth partly from the remains of corruption in the best souls, for tho' every sanctified person is come by his own consent into the kingdom, and under the government and sceptre of Christ, and every thought of his heart *de jure*, and of right must be subjected to him, 2 Cor. 10. 5. yet *de facto* the conquest and power of graces is but incompleat and in part, and natural corruption like *Jeroboam* with his vain men riseth up against it, and causeth many mutinies in the soul, whilst grace, like young *Abijah*, is weak handed, and cannot resist them. And partly from the advantage *Satan* makes upon the season to irritate and assist our corruptions: He knows that which is already in motion, is the more easily moved. In this confusion and hurry of the thoughts he undiscernedly shuffles in his temptations. Sometimes aggravating the evils which we fear with all the sinking and overwhelming circumstances imaginable. Sometimes divining and fore casting such events and evils as (haply) never fall out. Sometimes repining at the disposes of God as more severe to us than others. And sometimes reflecting with very unbelieving and unworthy thoughts upon the promises of God, and his faithfulness in them; by all which the affliction is made to sink deep into the soul before it actually comes. The thoughts are so disordered, that duty cannot be duly performed. And the soul is really weakened, and disabled to bear its trial when

when it comes indeed; Just as if a man were kept waking and restless all the night with the thoughts of his hard journey which he must travel to-morrow, and so when to-morrow is come, he faints for want of rest, mid-day his journey.

3. It is here supposed to be the Christian's great duty, under the apprehensions of approaching troubles, to resign his will to God's, and quietly commit the events and issues of all to him, whatever they may prove. Thus did David in the like case and circumstances, 2 Sam. 15. 25. 26. *And the King said unto Zadok, carry back the ark of God into the city. If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back again, and show me both it and his habitation: But if he shall thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him.*

O lovely and truly Christian temper! q. d. "Go Zadok, return with the ark to its place, tho' I have not the symbol, yet I hope I shall have the real presence of God with me in this sad journey: How he will dispose the events of this sad doubtful providence I know not: Either I shall return again to Jerusalem, or shall not. If I do, then I shall see it again, and enjoy the Lord in his ordinances there: If I do not, then I shall go to that place where there is no need or use of those things. And either way it will be well with me, I am content to refer all to the divine pleasure, and commit the issue, whatever it will be, to the Lord." And till our hearts come to the like resolve, we can have no peace within. *Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established,* Prov. 16. 3. By works he means not only every enterprize and business we undertake, but every puzzling, intricate, and doubtful event we fear. These being once committed by an act of faith, and our wills resigned unto his, besides the comfort we shall have in the issue, we shall have the present advantage of a well composed and peaceful spirit.

But this resignation is the difficulty; no doubt of peace, could we once bring our hearts to that. And therefore, I shall here subjoin such helps and directions, as may thro' God's blessing, in the faithful use of them, assist and facilitate this great and difficult work.

First Help.] Labour to work into your hearts, a deep and fixed sense of the infinite wisdom of God, and your own folly and ignorance. This will make resignation easy to you: Whatsoever the Lord doth, is by counsel, Eph. 1. 11. His understanding is infinite, Psal. 147. 5. His thoughts are very deep, Psal. 92. 5. But as for man, yea the wisest among men, how little doth his understanding penetrate the works and designs of providence? And how oft are we forced to retract our rash opinions, and confess our mistakes? acknowledging, that if providence had not seen with better eyes than ours, and looked farther than we did, we had precipitated ourselves into a thousand mischiefs, which by its wisdom and care we have escaped. It is well for us, that the *seven eyes of providence* are ever awake, and looking out for our good. Now, if one creature can and ought to be guided and governed by another that is more wise and skilful than himself, as the client by his learned counsel, the patient by his skilful physician, much more should every creature give up his weak reason, and shallow understanding to the infinite wisdom of the omniscient God.

It is nothing but our pride and arrogance, overvaluing our own understandings, that makes resignation so hard. Carnal reason seems to itself a wise disputant about the concerns of the flesh, but how often hath providence baffled it? The more humility, the more resignation.

How few of our mercies and comforts have been foreseen by us? Our own projects have come to nothing, and that which we never thought on, or contrived, hath taken place; not our choice of the ground, or skill in weighing and delivering the bowl, but some unforeseen providence, like a rub in the green, was that which made the cast.

Second Help.] Deeply consider the *sinsfulness and vanity of torturing your own thoughts about the issues of doubtful providences*.

There is much sin in so doing: For all our anxious and solicitous motions what are they, other than the immediate illues and fruits of pride and unbelief? There is not a greater discovery of pride in the world, than in the contests of our wills with the will of God. It is a pre-

sum-

sum
prov

2
thou
or b
to c
void
ot h

TL
submi
self-d
quarr

Ye
Abra
ther
said i
ing h
with

Pa
self, l
tells
who
he re

Acts 2

But
ample
est po
the F
garden
and re
where
amaze
hemen
still w
O ble
pleasu

Fou

a will
1. S
the the
man c

sumptuous invading of God's prerogative, to dictate to his providence, and prescribe to his wisdom.

2. There is a great deal of vanity in it: All the thoughtfulness of the world will not make one hair white or black: All our discontents will not prevail with God to call back, (or as the word may be rendered, make void) *Isa.* 31. 2. *He is in one mind*, *Job* 32. 13. the thoughts of his mind are from everlasting, *Psa.* 33. 11.

Third Help.] *Set before you those choice scripture patterns of submission to the Lord's will in as deep, yea, much deeper points of self-denial than this before you, and stame yourselves out of this quarrelling temper with providence.*

You know what a close trial that providence was to *Abraham*, that called him from his native country and father's house, to go he knew not whither; and yet it is said in *Isa.* 41. 2. he came to God's foot, as readily obeying his call, as a servant when his master knocks for him with his foot.

Paul's voyage to *Jerusalem*, had a dismal aspect upon himself, he could expect nothing but bonds and prisons, as he tells us, *Acts* 20. 23. and a great trial it was to the saints, who could not tell how to give up such a minister; yet he resigns up his will to God's *Acts* 20. 22. and so do they, *Acts* 21. 14. *The will of the Lord be done.*

But far beyond these, and all other patterns, what an example hath our dear Lord Jesus set before us, in the deepest point of self denial, that ever was in the world. When the Father gave the cup of sufferings into his hands in the garden, *Mark* 14. 36. a cup of wrath, the wrath of the great and terrible God, and that without mixture, the very taste whereof put nature into an agony and astonishment, a sore amazement, a bloody swear, and forced from him that vehement and sad cry, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass*; yet still with submission, *nevertheless not my will, but thine be done*. O blessed pattern of obedience, and resignation to the pleasure of God! What is your case to this?

Fourth Help.] *Study the singular benefits and advantages of a will resigned up, and melted into the will of God.*

1. Such a spirit hath a continual sabbath within itself; the thoughts are established, *Pro.* 23. 16. 3. and truly, till a man come to this, he doth but too much resemble the

Devil, who is a restless spirit, seeking rest, but finding none.

It was an excellent expression of Luther, to one that was much perplexed in his spirit about the doubtful events of some affairs of his that were then depending: *Dominus tuum curam faciat, & tu nihil facias, sed sis sabbatum Christi*; that is, *The Lord shall do all for thee, and thou shalt do nothing, but be the sabbath of Christ*. It is by this means that the Lord gives his beloved sleep, *Psat. 127. 2* he means not the sleep of the body, but the sleep of the spirit. *Fideles* (saith one upon that place) *esse vitam agant laboriosam, composcunt tamen & tranquillis animis in fidei scientia se continent, ac si dormirent*; that is, *Tho' believers live in the midst of many troubles here, yet with quiet and composed minds they keep themselves in the silence of faith, as tho' they were asleep*.

2. Besides, it fits a man's spirit for communion with God in all his afflictions; and this alleviates and sweetens beyond any thing in the world.

3. And surely a man is never nearer the mercy he desires, or the deliverance he expects (as one truly observes) than when his soul is brought into a submissive temper. *David* was never nearer the kingdom, than when he became as a weaned child.

Fifth Help.] Lastly, *Think how repugnant an unsubmissive temper is both to your prayers and professions.*

You pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven; and yet when it seems to cross your wills or interests, you struggle and fret against it. You profess to have committed your souls to his keeping, and to leave your eternal concerns in his hands; and yet cannot commit things infinitely less valuable unto him. How contradictory are these things!

Your profession, as Christians, speaks you to be led by the Spirit, but this practice speaks you to follow the perverse counsels of your own spirits. O then regret no more, dispute no more, but lie down meekly at your Father's feet, and say in all cases and at all times, *The Will of the Lord be done.*

And thus I have thro' the aid of Providence, performed what I designed to speak from this scripture. I acknowledge, my performances have been accompanied with much weakness, yet have endeavoured to speak of Providence the things that are right. Blessed be the Lord, who hath thus far assisted and protected me in this work.

POSTSCRIPT.

IN consideration of the great and manifold advantages resulting from an humble and heedful observation of providence, I cannot but judge it the concernment of Christians that have time and ability for this work, to keep written memorials, or journals of providences by them, for their own and others use and benefit. For want of collecting and communicating such observations, not only ourselves, but the church of God is damnified and impoverished.

Some say, the art of *Medicine* was thus acquired and perfected: When any one had met with some rare and *physical herb*, and accidentally discovered the virtues of it, he would post it up in some publick place; and so the *physician* attained his skill, by a collection of those posted experiments and receipts.

I am not for posting up all that a Christian knows or meets with in his experience, (for as I have said before) *Non est religio, ubi omnia patent.* Religion doth not lay all open; but yet there is a prudent, humble and seasonable communication of our experiences and observations of providence, which is exceeding beneficial both to ourselves and our brethren.

If Christians in reading the scriptures, would judiciously collect and record the providences they should meet with there, and (if destitute of other helps) but add those that have fallen out in their own time and experience; O what a precious treasure would these make! How would it antidote their souls against the spreading atheism of these days, and satisfy them beyond what many other arguments can do, that *The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God!*

Whilst this work was under my hand, I was both delighted and assisted by a pious and useful *Essay* of an unknown author, who hath to very good purpose improved many scriptural passages of providence, which seem to ly out of the road of common observation. Some passages I have noted out of it, which have been sweet to me. And O that Christians would every where set themselves to such work! Providence carries our lives, liberties and concernments in its hand every moment. Your bread is in its cupboard, your money in its purse, your safety in its enfolding arms; and sure, it is the least part of what you owe, to record the favours you receive at its hands. More particularly,

1. Trull not your slippery memories with such a multitude of remarkable passages of providence as you have, and shall

meet

meet with in your way to heaven. It is true, things that greatly affect us, are not easily forgotten by us; and yet, how ordinary is it for new impressions to raze out former ones! It was a saying of that worthy man Dr. Harris, *My memory* (said he) *never failed me in all my life; for, indeed, I durst never trust it.* Written memorials secure us against that hazard; and besides, makes them useful to others when we are gone. So that you carry not away all your treasure to heaven with you, but leave those choice legacies to your surviving friends. Certainly it were not so great a loss, to lose your silver, your goods and chattles, as it is to lose your experiences which God hath this way given you in this world.

2. Take heed of clasping up those rich treasures in a book, and thinking it enough to have noted them there; but have frequent recourse to them, as oft as new wants, fears or difficulties arise, and assault you. Now it is seasonable to consider and reflect, was I never so distressed before? Is this the first plunge that ever beset me? Let me consider the days of old, the years of ancient times, as *Asaph* did *Psal.* 77. 5.

3. *Lastly*, Beware of slighting former Straits and dangers in comparison with present ones. That which is next us always appears greatest to us: And as time removes us farther and farther from our mercies or dangers, so they lessen, in our eyes, just as the land from which they sail, doth to sea-men. Know, that your dangers have been as great, and your fears no less formerly than now. Make it as much your business, to preserve the sense and value, as the memory of former providences, and the fruit will be sweet to you.

7 JU 66

F I N I S.

THE T A B L E.

A 7 1666

A Buse of Scripture punished by providence.	Pag. 20
Abuse of providence cautioned.	67
Afflictions preventive of sin.	70
Afflictions restraints from sin.	77
Afflictions how they purge corruption	78
Adherence to creatures checked	82
Affections must suit providence	104
<i>Andreas</i> how called to the ministry.	50
Anticipations by religion advantageous	33
Assiduity of providential care	04
Association of natural causes	73
Atheism checked by providence	121
<i>Augustine's</i> strange deliverance	17
<i>Augustine's</i> converting a <i>Manichee</i>	44
B	
B Arbarous nations their sad state	28
Bible providentially mistaken	44
Body its elegant structure	24
<i>Bolton's</i> conversion	43
<i>Bruen's</i> happy marriage.	48
C	
C Allings ordered by providence	74
Callings sinful in themselves	95
Calling poor, some mens advantage	38
Cautions about civil callings	16
Care of God to be eyed in providence	100
Christ hath his hand six ways in providence	133
Children settled providentially in callings	56
Childrens duties pressed	39
Communion with God in providences. Rules for it, and the sweetness of it.	113
Committing to God quieting to us.	100
Complaints of painful callings answered	57
Comparing providences, how melting	186
Condescensions of God admirable	62, 82
Conversion two ways	41
Conversion endear places and instruments	40
Conversion how great a mercy	52, — 59
Content under all providences	109
D	
D Angers in extremity	7
Dangers of death providentially prevented	41

The CONTENTS.

Dependence on creatures how checked by providence	81
Delays of providence relieved	110
Devil busy with dying Christians	144
<i>Diana's</i> shrines what they were	55
Distrust not God in new difficulties	150
<i>Dod's</i> strange impulse	69
Duty to advert providence	85
Dying hour sweetned by providence	144
E	
E mbroys their condition	26
<i>England's</i> encomium	27
<i>Epicureans</i> why they denied providence	10
Expectation from creatures dashed	18
Eye how guarded by nature	24
F	
F aculties sound a choice providence	26
Faithfulness of God eyed in providence	103
Faith two signal acts of it	146
Families providentially assigned us	34
<i>Fox's</i> wonderful relief	65
G	
G OD leaves not his in-straits	97
God to be owned in all providences	148
Good mens affections over-heated	79
Greatness of God discovered	82
H	
H armony of conjugal affections providential	61
Harmony of God's attributes	117
Heavenly-mindedness in all providences	106
Heart how melted by providence	134
<i>Henry II.</i> punished by providence	19
Holiness improved by eying providence	141
I	
I deots the design of providence in them	26
Idle life a sinful life	55
<i>Jewel's</i> strange preservation	74
Interpositions of providence seasonable	69
Inobervance of providence sinful	88
Introductive providences remarkable	91
Instuments of providence to be noted	ib.
Immutability of God in changeable providences	103
Joy in God under providences	104
Interest how best secured	99
<i>Janus</i> his conversion how effected	42
K	
K eeper converted by their prisoners	45

L
M
Mor

N
Nati
Neig
Note

O
Obse
OEco
Oblig

P
P
Pare
Pare
Para
Plea
Place
Plea

Perfe
Pride
Praye
Praye
Provi
Provi
Provi
Provi
Provi
Provi

Q

R
R
Rebuk
Relian

The CONTENTS.

81	L iberty the best frugality	99
110	M	
144	M arriages the appointment of providence	43
55	Ministers removed ordered by providence	46
150	Mortification promoted by providence	75
69	N	
85	N atural causes suspended by providence	11
144	<i>Naaman's</i> change how effected	42
26	Nativity its place providentially ordered	27
27	Neighbourly visits improved by providence	45
10	Notes of attention why affix to providence	85
18	O	
24	O bjections of unbelief solv'd by providence	129
26	Observations of providence matter of praise	87
103	Observations of providence endear Christ	130
146	<i>Oecolampadius</i> designed for a merchant	56
34	Obligations to duty from providence	149
65	P	
97	P arents godly what a mercy	35
148	Papists their doom	30
79	Parents advantages opened	36
82	Parents suffering from children	62
63	<i>Parvus</i> designed for an apothecary	56
117	Pleasures of a Christian in providence	117
106	Places of sinning, places of suffering	19
134	Pleasing God our interest	151
19	Persecutors baffled by providence	14
141	Pride checked by providence	86
26	Prayer must preface business	150
55	Prayer furnished by providence	88
74	Providence working good out of evil	119
69	Providence pursues the saints	120
88	Providence stops the way to sin	142
91	Providence must follow scripture	154
ib.	Providence nicks the opportunity	22
103	Providence consonant to prayer	23
104	Providence breaks <i>Egyptian</i> reeds	95
99	Providence fails none that trust it	97
42	Provision for us and ours, what a providence	64
45	Q	
	Q uieting considerations under sad providences	107
	Quieting arguments drawn from providence	137
	R	
	R ecognitions of providence supports to faith	100
	Records of providence must be full	6
	Rebukes of providence how useful	142
	Reliance on God pleasurable in prayer	3

Personal duties pressed	67
Prayers ordered by providence	68
Prayer of prayers pleasant to observe	119
Prayer providentially relieved	122
Prayer to discover the will of God	196

S

<i>Satan's</i> conversion how wrought	47
<i>Satan's</i> malice over-ruled by providence	47
Sanctification of providence how discerned	92
Sinning at purity punished by providence	19
Scope of providence very considerable	92
Seasonable provisions of providence	64
Seamen's admirable preservation	73
Servant's running from his master improved	54
Spring and autumn of providence	135
Soul its excellent nature	25
Self-denial no damage	97
Shepherd's pious observation of providence	52
Spanish foldiers how converted	43

T

<i>Tartars</i> and <i>Turks</i> their sad state	30
<i>Dr. Tate's</i> strange experience of providence	22
Temptations prevented by providence	68
Temptations narrowly escaped	71
Tenderness of providence to the saints	129
Thanksgiving includes five things in it	126
Tranquillity promoted by eying providence	137
Trusting God before trial noble faith	126

V

Value of providence in diverse things	90
<i>Venice-glass</i> how used by providence	51
<i>Vergilius</i> his strange conversion	43
Views of providence two-fold	10
Vileness of man discovered	82
Unequal marriages what a misery	62
Vagabond parents their sin and misery	36

W

<i>Wales</i> , a strange conversion there	43
Wars how providence preserves in them	73
Weak means succeeded by providence	14
Will of God how distinguished	153
Will of God how revealed	153
Wind serves providence	121
Wicked men how quieted under crosses	107
Wisdom of God to be eyed in providence	100
Word of God the best support in trouble	98